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Sermons

SERMONS.

SERMONS

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ALEXANDER McCLELLAND, D. D.

EDITED BY

RICHARD W. DICKINSON, D. D.

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PREFACE.

ALEXANDER MCCLELLAND was remarkable in his youth for his great facility in learning, and the rapid development of his mental faculties. Having received his collegiate education at Union, Schenectady, he commenced his preparatory studies for the ministry of the gospel at Pittsburgh, Pa., under the care of the late Rev. John Anderson, D. D., of the Associate Presbyterian Church; but, owing to the superior advantages which the Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Synod then presented at New York, he availed himself of the earliest opportunity of attending the lectures of the late Dr. John M. Mason. It was in connection with that seminary he completed his course; and when but nineteen years of age he was licensed by the Associate Reformed Presbytery to preach the gospel. Shortly after this — in 1815 — he was ordained and installed, and became the successor of the late Dr. Philip Milledoller in the pastorate of the Presbyterian Church, then situated in Rutgers street in the city of New York. After the lapse of seven years (during which period he sustained himself in the duties of his charge with distinguished ability, and growing reputation as a preacher), he was elected to

the Professorship "of Rhetoric, Logic, and Metaphysics" in Dickinson College, at Carlisle, Pa. Thither he moved with his family in 1822; and there remained, applying himself with marked assiduity to the duties of his professorship, and securing increasing influence over the minds of his students, until, in 1829, he removed to New Brunswick, New Jersey, where, in connection, at first with Rutgers College as "Professor of Languages," and afterwards with the Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church in the department of "Oriental Literature and Biblical Criticism," he spent the greater part of his remaining days. His death — preceded by a gradual paralysis of all his organs — occurred in the sixty-ninth year of his age, on the nineteenth day of December, 1864.[1]

He was in some respects better fitted for the professor's chair than the pastoral office, — at least so he himself thought, — and, on this account, retained his professorship at Carlisle, though repeatedly invited to resume a charge, and unanimously called to the First Presbyterian Church at Philadelphia, when rendered vacant by the death of Dr. James Wilson.

Still, Dr. McClelland continued to preach at intervals, — though oftener than otherwise in some retired place, and where he was not expected. Being averse to having himself announced, he was seldom forward to make a timely engagement.

[1] On the sixth of August, 1816, he was married to the eldest daughter of the late Charles Dickinson, of the city of New York, who still survives him, with six of their children, — two sons and four daughters.

He was reluctant, moreover, to publish any particular sermon or lecture; not so much through fear of criticism (though he was nervously sensitive to the least flaw that might be detected), as from the consciousness of not having satisfied his own mind, — so high was his standard of excellence in the lecture-room as well as in the pulpit, and so irksome to him the labor of preparing a manuscript for the press.

Whatever he might have accomplished in other relations, in this respect he disappointed his friends. They had anticipated some great work from his pen; but, with the exception of a few racy articles for newspapers, he has left in print only "A brief Treatise on the Canon and Interpretation of the Scriptures;" a pamphlet on "The Marriage Question;" together with two discourses, — the one on "A Standing Ministry;" the other, "A Vindication of the Religious Spirit of the Age," — both written and preached during the period of his youthful pastorate.

But whoever may have read these discourses will respond to our expression of regret that Dr. McClelland had not selected and revised a given number of manuscript sermons for the press.

Though hearers differ in their views of the merits of a particular sermon, and their judgment is not unfrequently strangely biased, — some preferring that which cost the least expense of studious preparation, or that which has merely captivated the fancy; yet no one is so competent a judge of his own written utterances for the pulpit as the preacher himself, — that is, if he be a man of disciplined thought, and

critical acumen. He alone knows what object, in reliance on God's grace, he proposed to himself in essaying a particular discourse; and whether it is in the clearest, strongest manner, according to his ability, adapted to that end In proportion to its adaptedness, not to display mental resources, nor to secure a brilliant reputation; but, in keeping with the great design of the gospel ministry, to bring home Bible-truth to the heart and the life, — will be its merits in the view of him who can conscientiously say: "I believe, and therefore speak."

The Bible never violates its unity of design. The Old Testament is contained in the New, and the New Testament in the Old; and whether our attention be directed to ceremonial enactments or to evangelical requisitions, — to prophecy or to miracles, — to a fact, a character, an incident, an argument, or a saying, — to the tables of the decalogue, or the precepts of the gospel, — to Moses or to Christ, — it is manifest that the Scriptures have but one and the same object; that is, to guide us into the way of *eternal life*. Thus, the author of these sermons, though wont to select his texts from different parts of the Old Testament as well as the New, seems to have been guided in the disposition of his thoughts on any given topic, by the drift of Revelation or the analogy of Scripture, — showing its subservience to evangelical truth and duty; and sometimes disclosing, but in a manner quite unexpected to his hearers, its designed, if not necessary, relation to the Alpha and Omega, or to its scriptural bearing on the future of the soul.

Still, he must have been an exception from all preachers, had

he not had his favorite texts or subjects, and his preferences among his mental productions. But his manuscripts disclose no marks by which we may ascertain whether he preached some more than others; or whether any one among them was at any time uttered in public. Devoid of a single entry, — such as ministers are accustomed to make, and which, in some instances, amount to scores, — a stranger, on examining the manuscripts, might conclude, from the hue of the paper, or from some local reference or allusion to the events of the day, that, though written at different periods of his history, they were never delivered. Yet, independently of my own recollection, I have, on inquiry, ascertained from several ministers of standing in different churches, that these are some of the sermons he was accustomed to use after his retiracy from the pastoral office. A few of them, though comparatively of less intrinsic value, — having owed the interest they awakened at the time of their delivery mainly to the force of circumstances, — are so well remembered, that to withhold them would be to disappoint. Nor have I felt at liberty to modify a sentiment, much less suppress any view of a mooted point as found in the manuscripts, lest the writer should not be immediately recognized by those who have been most desirous of their publication. I find, however, from various interlineations and transpositions in his unmistakable chirography, that some of the manuscripts have been subjected to successive corrections, with here and there either an erasure or addition; and that several have been re-written with special care.

Bearing, then, the impress of his intellect and the charac-

teristics of his style, no less clearly than serving to convey to the inquiring mind the grounds of his faith and the use he was wont to make of the ethical element in Christianity, they may be viewed as constituting a fair specimen of his pulpit utterances.

It comes not within our province, in simply editing these sermons, to analyze their character, or formally estimate Dr. McClelland's merits as a preacher of the gospel. Suffice it to say, that, aside from his "eccentricities," so called, which failed not to attract notice, and his not unfrequent forms of expression, which were apt to be repeated, — thus rendering minds of a certain class not a little curious to hear him, — it were to be expected that a man who could deliver his sermons from memory with the earnestness of one whose mind is surcharged with his subject, with the naturalness and ease of an extemporaneous speaker, — having, too, a voice of unusual flexibility, fulness, and power, adapted to the appropriate expression of every sentiment, — would awaken an interest in the community, and become noted for the style and manner of his preaching.

He himself could not endure either declamation or mistiness in the pulpit, much less prosing. If he was careful to avoid any one thing, it was preaching in such a way that no one could understand him, or take an interest in what he said; much more of exposing himself to any invidious reflection on his understanding. This was so characteristic of him, that he might have appropriated the language of old Harrington: "There is nothing in the world, next to the favor of God, I so much desire as to be understood."

On one occasion, after a service, he said to the minister who had occupied the pulpit: "Will you be good enough, sir, to tell me what you meant by *that* expression? I did not understand you; and I doubt whether your Master did."

Again: while delivering a charge to a young minister just installed, he said: "I know it is by the foolishness of preaching that it has pleased God to save them that believe; but be careful, young man, be *careful* lest you should make your preaching *too foolish!*"

It was, perhaps, owing to this,— his aversion to stereotyped forms, his nervous dread of even approaching to monotony and tediousness in the pulpit,— that he at times verged to the other extreme: resorting to irony, to a stroke of humor, a sarcastic allusion, a quaint story, or employing phrases but too obvious in their import and too well fitted to divert the mind of an audience from the weighty subject to which their attention had been called.

Aside from this, and however much the more serious among his auditors might have thought that he occasionally deviated too far from that grave propriety of utterance which becomes the pulpit, yet to hear him was to be arrested by the manner of his discourse: preaching as he did in his early and best days with the freshness and fervor and vigor of a mind that, smitten with the love of truth, works out its own thoughts and conclusions; with the solemnity of one whose soul is overborne with a sense of spiritual realities; with the boldness and fidelity of one who is "determined to know nothing," while addressing dying sinners, "but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

Adhering strictly to his text, he was, by turns, argumentative, expository, descriptive, inferential, and experimental: having cultivated his imagination no less than his powers of reasoning, and disciplined his faculties to habits of philosophic observation as well as to rigorous method in the investigation of truth: thus securing to his pulpit clearness, strength, variety, and aptness of illustration; and, had it not been for that vein of sarcastic humor in which he was so prone to indulge, rendering his ministrations in all respects adapted to wide-spread usefulness and permanent results.

The pulpit essentially differs from the bar or the platform in the temper of its utterances. Not that it should lack directness, vividness, and force; but what is allowable, if not necessary, in other relations of public speaking, in *this* is always questionable; and we are the less reluctant to note the distinction, not merely because the high and serious end which the pulpit contemplates would seem appropriately to require words of soberness as well as of truth, but also from the fact that whatever in figurative language, in illustration, or in terms, is of doubtful propriety in the utterances of some conspicuously popular preacher, is wont, by amusing or infecting the imagination, to mislead the judgment of some youthful candidate for the ministry. Thus, whenever any of Dr. McClelland's youthful admirers essayed to imitate him, it was in his peculiarities rather than in those qualities which constituted his real excellence as a preacher, — excellence so decided, that allowance could be made even by those who would rather he had omitted his

episodes of irony, or reserved his sarcasm for a different occasion; an allowance, be it considered, never extended to those who can rise no higher than abortive attempts at imitation.

But notwithstanding his propensity to excite a smile at the expense of some one or other, and which, from neglect of timely efforts to control, became a chronic affection of mind, he was rich in thought, evangelical in doctrine, in general practical, and, at times, searching in his analysis of the carnal mind; never ministering encouragement to unscriptural hopes, nor failing to expose the sophistries of error and rebut the cavils of infidels. Few, if any, of his contemporaries, during the early years of his ministry, could be more instructive than he on any given point of duty; more graphic in the description of a scene or delineation of a character; more affecting in showing forth the Saviour's dying love, or impressive in addressing dying men, when eternity, with its vast realities, seemed to fill the sphere of his vision.

In the course of preparation for his successive professorships, his studies necessarily assumed a wider range. He had resumed and extended his classical readings; examined the various systems both of ancient and modern philosophy; watched the progress of scientific investigation, and noted whatever was valuable in the literature of his day; but the deeper his acquaintance with mind, under the natural conditions of its development, the higher his appreciation of the Bible. In *it* was exhaustless material for thought; repose for the reason; food for the soul, nowhere

else to be found. To its divine authority he bowed with docility in all matters of faith; for its teachings inculcated the deepest reverence; and, inclined as he was to speculative thought, fond of broaching a theory for the sake of social discussion, or testing one's ability to reply, yet, in his serious hours, he never travelled in thought beyond the inspired record: thus devoutly recognizing the limits of legitimate speculation in relation to God and the soul.

In his judgment, no veneration for the Bible could be relied on as firm and effective, that is not founded on a deep and intimate acquaintance with its treasures. No one can be proof against the suggestions of "an evil heart of unbelief," and much less the imposing theories and malign insinuations of modern skepticism, who has not subjected himself to the same discipline by which the babe in Christ grows up to be a healthy, vigorous man in Christ. Hence, where the biblical studies of too many end, his began, and were continued at intervals, notwithstanding the pressure of other studies, until, during the period of his last professorship, his Bible became, as it were, a part of his intellectual self. A union seemed to be effected between his very thinking substance and the favorite subjects of its meditations, which, to use his own expression, "all the chemistry of hell could not dissolve."

Other ends are to be answered by the use of "the lively oracles of God," than to abstract from them a few simple propositions, like "algebraic formulas or gastronomical recipes." Error is to be respected rather than "a puffy, empty, gossiping Christianity." The motives which the Bible pre-

sents to deter from sin are fearful enough to the mind of serious thought, without investing "the doctrine of everlasting punishment" with *material* terrors. Truth, however it may be assailed by its enemies, can be injured only by its friends. These, and similar views, expressed in his peculiar way, did not always convey the most felicitous idea either of his orthodoxy or brotherly love. But his occasional way of noticing any turgid representation of a doctrine, of treating some miserable conceit, or of exposing the weak points of an argument even when advanced in behalf of an orthodox point, only proved, to those who *knew* him, not the unsoundness of his faith, but that he had unwittingly rendered himself "an offender for a word."

For many years he preached but seldom. It was often difficult to prevail on him to accept an invitation; nor would he preach unless thoroughly prepared. Here is the secret of that degree of pulpit excellence to which he attained, — it was *by study*. From my earliest recollection of him, he was a close student; and, in the whole course of my association with ministers of the gospel, I have seldom met with one who bestowed more thought on a discourse, or expended more time in preparation for a particular service. It seemed to be his settled conviction, that no one could refresh, much less kindle and elevate, an audience but by *real thought;* and this could be attained only by the patient application of a well-disciplined and richly-stored mind to the fundamental principles of Christian faith and practice.

What were the precise results of his early ministry we are unable to state. The greater part of those to whom he

then ministered preceded him to the grave. The influence of his public life, therefore, will be perpetuated rather through those who, during their collegiate or their theological course, enjoyed his instructions and heard his lectures, than by any who but occasionally heard him preach; though all, who either attended his classes or retain the recollection of any sermon they might have chanced to hear, will be gratified to know that some of his productions were not included in the contents of the old "hair trunk" which he "bequeathed to the flames."

R. W. D.

New York, Jan. 2, 1867.

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The Lord Reigneth.

SERMONS.

I.

THE LORD REIGNETH.

Ps. 97 : 1. The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice.

HOUGH nothing more had been revealed in Scripture than the genial truth contained in this one passage, it would be the richest boon ever conferred on mankind. When the sublime sentiment is engraven on the heart, — "There is a God, there is a Providence," — we meditate with serene Christian philosophy on the various untoward occurrences that are turning up on our restless little planet. The human actors are, with all their bravery and strut, mere fantoccini or dancing puppets, acting their little part on the stage according to the will of the great Mechanician, who holds within his fingers every one of the strings that give them play and movement. Thus, whether revolving the past, present, or future, we exult in the persuasion that we are under the best of governments, because at its head is the *best of beings*.

I propose to offer a few plain thoughts on the extent of the divine dominion and some of its essential properties; not, however, on the *whole* extent, for that would open too large a field; but that immediately and specifically named in the text, — "The Lord reigneth: let the *earth* rejoice." To this small, outlying province, then, of the divine empire your attention will be drawn; first, to the physical earth, and secondly to its moral inhabitants.

I. The physical earth, or what is commonly called *Nature*. We sometimes allow ourselves to be cheated out of our belief in great truths by the sophistry of high-sounding, though really empty, words. Providence, we are sometimes told, if it has any proper meaning, is simply the regular operation of certain general laws, which are either eternal or were impressed on matter at the creation. These laws are *living forces*, doing their work unbidden and unaided, nor requiring the interference of any extrinsic agent. According to this theory, which establishes a true deification of nature, a God might have been indispensable when finite existence commenced; but has been superseded by the collegium of inferior potencies to whom the working of the great machine is now committed, except that, at distant intervals, he may appear for a moment to wind it up. Strange, that men of sense should be found to sport such unmitigated absurdities, as if those living forces, which they speak of with such glib assurance, were so many gods and goddesses, and not simply abstractions of the understanding, — general names applied to classes of facts regularly assorted for the advantage of the memory and for

convenient expression! The efficient causes (the real vital energy), that underlie and animate the mighty mass of being, are not seen nor comprehended. We perceive one event succeeding another in unbroken order; but what in one produces and necessitates the other, no science will ever explain, unless, accepting the teachings of a higher wisdom, she attributes it to the immediate efficiency of the great First Cause "in whom," as the apostle expresses it beautifully and with philosophical precision, "we live and move and have our being." Such seems to be the conclusion in actual favor with enlightened physicists of the present day. Nature is

"Owned a name for an effect, whose cause is God. He feeds the secret fire;
By him the mighty process is maintained; who sleeps not, is not weary, in whose sight
Slow circling ages are as transient days, and whose beneficence no change exhausts."

Starting from these reflections, let us survey for a moment the fair variety of things around us. What order is exhibited! What admirable proportions and mutual adaptation! It may be compared to a magnificent tissue or web, formed by innumerable golden threads, crossing and interlacing each other with such beautiful regularity that everything is in its proper place, and all united make up a grand whole, which it is impossible to look upon without admiration. The heavenly bodies roll along their appointed path with calm majesty, never in their march jostling each other nor deranging their respective movements. The earth remains lightly poised in mid-ether, and yet stable as if built on indestructible foundations.

Every year brings on the seasons in due succession. Every day sees the luminous ball above our heads rise and sink at the marked-out moment. Nature makes *no mistake*. The insect, bird, quadruped, fish, reptile, — all are provided for. All wait upon God, that he may give them their meat in due quantity and time.

Look *there*, at a spectacle more truly admirable than that which drew from Moses the exclamation, "I will turn aside and see this great sight," — a bush burning with fire and not consumed. You see the Lord Almighty — who sits upon the circle of the heavens, whose arm sustains the universe — *feeding a little fly!* In a word, the same hand that created preserves. There is in the universe no decay, no destruction; what we call destruction being nothing more than an old substance passing over into a new form. Whatever beauty or use the works of God had six thousand years ago they have to-day. The sun shines out on our gardens and cornfields as radiantly as on the morning when he commenced his circuit. The ground possesses the same principle of fecundity as when it first heard the edict, "Let it bring forth grass; the herb bearing seed and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind. This is the Lord reigning in the *physical or material* world.

Equally intimate is the relation between an all-pervading Providence and the affairs of man. The same divine hand that controls and directs the processes of dead nature regulates every wheel and pulley in the complicated mechanism of human society. All events, whether men choose to call them the great or

small, are ordered according to the counsel of his will. Those astonishing changes in empires, for example, which seem to arise from the ambition of princes or a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances, are under the guidance of Him who mocks the projects of earthly wisdom, laughs to scorn the shrewd Ahithophels of this world, — blasting their enterprises at the moment of apparent success, and at last, when no further purpose is to be answered by their continuance on the stage, hanging them with their *own rope*. Nor is his inspection limited to the earth's mighty ones. I know of nothing more delightful in Holy Scripture than the earnestness with which it dwells on the condescending goodness of the almighty Parent to men, as *simple individuals*, without regard to adventitious differences. He is the Father of the fatherless, the stay of him whom no man regardeth, — glancing as benignantly on Bartimeus in his blindness, and Lazarus in his poverty and sores, as on Ahasuerus, sitting on the throne of his kingdom and reigning over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

But the doctrine is fanatical, say some. It lays down the unphilosophical hypothesis of a constant arbitrary interference with the regular and beautiful course of nature established at the beginning. That he is the original Author of that course, and exercises a general superintendence over the laws which regulate it, the objectors concede, — at least, the most serious and reflective part of them; but that he perpetually thrusts in a violent force upon their legitimate operations to produce special results, tries too severely their powers of belief. But we advocate no

violent interposition nor miraculous introduction of a discord into the established harmony of things. We advocate nothing, in short, but what is exemplified every moment by our own operations on the objects that surround us. We are continually *acting upon nature* by our free volitions; exercising over it a directive and controlling influence, which if less frequent would be scarcely credited. Let me illustrate this idea in detail, for the benefit of those whom the supposed difficulty seriously embarrasses; but which we shall show, without much trouble, is no difficulty at all.

When you look abroad, you see everything in movement. Action and reaction, union and decomposition, growth and decay, — in a word, *change*, *stir*, *elemental war*, — seem impressed on all that is most stable and permanent. We talk of rest in the grave. The animal chemist, however, informs us that this is true only in figure, — that the most intensively active processes with which he is acquainted are incessantly going on in that lively little world — a coffin. When we undertake to explain this endless whirl and motion, we do not usually refer — indeed never except in religious discourse — to the primary, efficient cause — God — but speak of certain secondary causes which are in constant play; for example, electricity, caloric, gravitation, impulse, chemical affinity, and repulsion, — organic life. These are nature's *drudge laborers*, serving her with blind obedience, never deviating, of their own proper motion, a hair-breadth from the track marked out for them in the creative plan. Looking at them

alone, and apart from a still higher force, you might easily conclude that all things happen by a fatal necessity, one occurrence growing out of another by an immutable law of causation. But now bring upon the scene a new agency (I am not speaking of the divine, for this is the point in question), — I say, a new agency, entirely different in its manner of working, and more exalted by possessing the attributes of spirituality, — independence and self-determination; introduce, in other words, a *mind*, — your theory begins to topple over, like all ambitious structures without a good base and well-placed centre of gravity. It made *no provision for this high power*. Faithful in observing the varied phenomena of mere matter, and reasoning on them with perfect accuracy, if they had formed the whole system of being, it did not bring *man into its iron mathematics*. Look at this book a moment, and imagine it, if you please, a stone lying on the ground. There it is, bound to the earth by the law of gravity, and bound to *remain* there, as far as we can judge; for no earthly force is in action to counteract the tendency to remain precisely on the spot which it occupies. But it begins to move, — move independently, to all seeming, of every known law of physics. It gently rises, as if it had received a soul, and stands self-poised in air like Mohammed's coffin. A "miracle," we would say, if we witnessed it for the first time; but, familiar with the occurrence, we speak of the force of a human arm. That arm received its movement from the contraction of a piece of flesh called a *muscle;* and that contraction was the effect of an incomprehen-

sible energy communicated through little threads of nerves from the brain. And what of the brain? All we know is, that its action was excited by the simple volition or will of a being who possessed the power of beginning movement, by its own sovereign thought. What, indeed, is the whole life of man but a successful struggle with necessity,—an almost complete subjugation of the activities of matter to his purposes, nay, to his whims and humors. The moment Adam rose out of the dust a live man, he, in the exercise of his free agency, put himself in communication with an external world, to operate on it, to change it. Standing by a tree loaded with fruit, he puts out his hand by a simple movement of his mind, and tears from the stem an apple. That apple, on the objector's principles, ought not to have been subjected to such treatment. It should have remained on its twig till it had advanced from ripeness to decay, then fallen to the ground like the rest of its family, and *remained* there till decomposition rendered it back to the elements. What a fine history has Adam spoiled! Here we see a little animal, scarce six feet high, stepping out and originating a new order of things by an interposition as little to be expected, before the fact, as any which we attribute to the providence of the Deity. It is just the same in all cases. His whole life is, as I have said, a series of interference. He might be defined (it is surprising that no logician ever thought of it) an *interfering* animal. He commands the gold to come from the solid rock, where it should have remained imbedded till the next grand telluric catastrophe, and *it comes*.

At his edict the iron leaps from its ore, and forms itself into a thousand instruments of art, not one of which would have ever existed by the operation of mere physical laws. How many millions and billions of years would it have taken all the galvanism, the electricity, gravitation, etc., in the universe, to fabricate this little button on my coat, or this pen-knife, had not a strong will, directed by reason and intelligence, walked in among these brute forces, and put them to account!

Thus, man is constantly engaged in stamping on the works of God his own image and superscription; mingling his own personality with everything he touches. Nothing comes from his plastic hand *unchanged*. He tunnels the mountains, builds cities, turns forests into gardens, spreads a network of canals and railroads round the globe, by means of which he propels himself with the velocity of a bird. He shoots through the air, mocking its resistance and the power of gravity, almost verifying that sublime description of the Deity, "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly on the wings of the wind." The very lightning he tames, and brings it down by a silken string into his bottle. Even his daily food is extorted by him from mother earth, *not without violence;* and some of its most valued articles may be called his own creation. The nutritive potato, for instance, before it fell into his hands, was an acrid and poisonous root, in which a greater change has been effected than if one of our savage aboriginals were taken from his native forest, and, by a forcing process unhappily not yet discovered, made

to receive the stamp of a high civilization. The wheat, from which we make our daily bread, is not a natural production, being nowhere found except in our companionship. Man is its patentee and inventor; at an early period he discovered a mean grass totally void of alimentary qualities (some think it was a species of wild mustard), and, after a long struggle, succeeded in raising it, by his active intelligence and perseverance, to a queenly rank in the vegetable kingdom.

With these plain evidences before us of a *human Providence* and its admirable doings, can we hesitate to believe that the same high attribute belongs essentially and in an infinitely higher degree to the Almighty Creator? But this, they say, implies that terrible thing — a "miracle." Really! Does man, in impressing his free activity on matter, work a miracle? Is it an unnatural and bloody violence which he exercises? We do not find anything miraculous in the fact, so often recorded in the newspapers, that the commander of a noble ship, by his energetic skill in managing the powers of nature, succeeds in drawing off from a lee-shore in the very teeth of tide and tempest, — one of the finest spectacles the eye can feast on; — but the suggestion makes some people furiously nervous that the Author of the universe, in fit emergencies, — answering, let us suppose, the mournful cry ascending from a thousand of his perishing creatures, or from some other inducement worthy of moving his benevolent heart, — may exercise a similar control. Let us take the comfort of our doctrine without the least misgiving. Indeed,

we cannot do without it. The inborn sense of dependence, — that instinct by which, in the hour of peril and helplessness, we look upward to the heavens, — proves how deeply the belief is laid in our spiritual natures. Yes; the Divine Parent is in constant communication with the works of his hands. Miserable would be the state of things if there was the faintest shadow of reason to suspect that we have dropped down into a fatherless world. "What would it concern me," says a venerable heathen sage and Roman emperor, "to live in a world without God and without a Providence? Better, if things were so, to *be a dog* than a man!"

II. We proceed to consider some of the essential properties of the divine administration, as delineated in Holy Scripture, and illustrated by apt examples.

Their sovereignty, or independence of all impelling causes, except the ruler's own good pleasure, within the limits, however, always of moral rectitude, for though he may surprise us by his procedures, he can never deny himself. This appears in such things as the following: in the choice of individuals to stations of eminence and usefulness; in working with or without means; and in overruling evil for the production of good. Much of it appears in the selection of persons to particular stations and services. Why, asks the young student of his Bible, was a Mesopotamian herdsman chosen to be the father of the faithful, the recipient of the promise? Why Aaron, the idolater and calf-maker, fixed in the high-priesthood to the exclusion of Moses, his more deserving brother? The stripling David anointed to sway the

sceptre rather than a veteran of distinguished reputation, inured to the labors of the camp? Twelve poor fishermen, called from their nets to apostolic responsibilities, over members of the Sanhedrim, rulers of the synagogue, and rich Josephs of Arimathea? We should learn, from such examples, a lesson of contented humility, and not to be our own appraisers as to what niche of honor or usefulness we should fill in society. According to our great Christian poet, there is a class of angels before the throne who have no active services to perform, but are not on this account without their worth and dignity. "These *stand and wait*," he says, gracefully acquiescing in their inaction; contented, since God will have it so, that others have the honor of bearing the heat and burden of the day. We should all feel that our Master can do perfectly well without us, and that we are possibly among those whose best obedience, under existing circumstances, is just to *sit still*, or be *hewers of wood and drawers of water*.

We may notice, also, that as he qualifies men for certain services, so he raises them up at the *proper season*, neither too early nor too late. It is a favorite speculation of the political thinker, that when a community has become ripe for important changes in their condition, the person or persons to accomplish it are *always at hand;* being produced, as it were, by spontaneous generation. Hence their maxim, "*With the time comes the man.*" We have not so read history. It tells us that nations have long been pressed down for a succession of ages, though perfectly *ripe* for deliverance, because there was no *deliverer;* and also, that

when actually found, he seemed to be the child of an extraordinary and almost miraculous concurrence of circumstances. When Christianity was established in the Roman empire, in the third century, an emperor accomplished it who had been converted from heathenism in the most sudden and surprising manner. When Luther arose, he would soon have been quenched out but for a great temporal prince, — the Elector of Saxony, — who, by a singular leading of Providence, was induced to give his powerful protection. The revolution in England, which established her religious and civil freedom, was accomplished through the Dutch William of Nassau, who, having married into the exiled family, stepped, against all human expectation, into the vacant throne. Or, coming home to ourselves, was such a man as George Washington the product of spontaneous generation? Let us amend the maxim by the addition of a single word, and, instead of saying "*With the time comes the man*," let us affirm the high and glorious truth, "With God's time comes the man of God to do his work in the earth."

Again; God often exhibits sovereignty by the unlikely ways and means through which he brings about important events. The daughter of Pharaoh, a volatile girl, is filled, by a strange influence on her mind, with a compassionate love to the future legislator of Israel, though a detested Hebrew, and brings him up as her own son. The sling and stone of a young shepherd-boy prevail over the huge bulk and spear, like a weaver's beam, of Goliath. Thus, by the inadequacy of the means, — so out of all proportion to the

end proposed, that reason, unassisted by faith, is shocked at the incongruity,— God lets us see that the efficacy is of himself alone, and that no seeming impossibilities should stagger the confidence of his people. Sovereignty also appears in restraining the purposes of the wicked, and changing their counsels. Laban pursued Jacob with intents of mischief, probably murder. But a mighty yet gentle finger so touched certain springs in the hard man's bosom that, when they meet, the storm has become a calm, and their parting is in peace. It is noted by the Rabbis, as a remarkable fact in Old-Testament history, that the implacable Philistines never once attacked Judea in those seasons of the year when all the males were worshipping at Shiloh, and the borders of the country left without defenders. At an important crisis in the affairs of the church it was deemed expedient to engage the services of a young Pharisee, distinguished by his bitter opposition to the cause, — Saul of Tarsus. Instantly the furious persecutor is transformed into a disciple such as the world never saw. I am confining myself to Bible illustrations, which every child in a Christian audience may be presumed to know, aware, at the same time, that facts of a miraculous nature may be thought by some not exactly appropriate to a general argument for Divine Providence.

But consider this matter right. The miracle, in a transaction of this kind, is merely an attendant *circumstance*, not its *principle*. It is the garniture and vestment, or, we may say, the carcass of God's sublime idea, which he sends out thus apparelled in special conjunctures, that men may *see* it whose minds are

not yet trained for spiritual vision, — *not the idea itself*, — as the rolling thunder does not produce the magnificent effects, often witnessed, which set us all agape, but only give the electric fluid *voice;* in other words, is its sign and accompaniment, which might be conceived as entirely absent while the true power is in concentrated action. *Now*, the Supreme Disposer moves in a more silent way his wonders to perform. There is the electric energy *without the thunder*. Every recorded miracle, therefore, is truly *ours*, *and for* us, — not to gaze at with stupid wonderment, but to extract its rich kernel of meaning. Only let us draw aside the outward drapery, and *get behind the veil*, and at once we find ourselves in the Holy of Holies, not as "strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints and the household of God," contemplating the same grand truths that have been the life and soul of piety in every age since the world began.

A second property of the divine administration is its *rectitude*. Nothing, indeed, seems more opposite to this, in a mere glancing view, than the general aspect of human society. Wickedness is everywhere rampant. Piety for the most part lies neglected in dark corners, while the bad are crowned with wealth, influence, and applause. But, after all, what matters it that Heaven has bestowed the largest and juiciest slices of this world to those who abuse the gift? These juicy slices are *their all;* a poor portion, at best, but most beggarly when we consider how soon it takes wings, and flies away like an eagle toward heaven. The good man's afflictions, in the language of the apostle, "endure only a moment, and work out a far more

exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He is put in the furnace to burn out his dross, and make him a vessel fit for holy temple use. Call to mind that the most precious ornaments of the old sanctuary were made of *beaten* gold. To be brought to proper fineness, it must be *beaten*, and well beaten, — and thus, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Universal experience shows that prosperity is not the field where virtue flourishes. The soil is too rich. A luxuriance of weeds chokes the tender plants, and makes them unfruitful. When Jeshuran waxed fat, he kicked. Adam's defection took place in Paradise. Noah's generous vine, though a horticultural success, proved a fearful snare to the old patriarch. But we never hear of any of the old heroes of the faith being permanently the worse for their *trials*. Was Israel forgotten in Egypt and Babylon, Jeremiah in the dungeon, Job when he sat down in the ashes, or Daniel among the lions? No! A hand unseen sustained them, and, when their smitings were sorest, their helps were nearest. Here is the solution of the great problem of suffering virtue, which has engaged so many minds in vain attempts to unriddle it; vain, I say, and utterly futile, "darkening counsel with words without knowledge," because they *brought to the solution no faith in God.*

III. The dispensations of Providence are all subsidiary to the mediatorial kingdom of Christ. This opens a bright scene to observant piety. The confusion of tongues at Babel produced the peopling of

those regions which have since been brought to the fellowship of the gospel. The calling of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees was the origin of that nation through whom the Saviour was to be manifested. The bringing this people from Egypt to Canaan, preserving them distinct amidst their numerous dispersions, so that they never lost their national life; at length causing the sceptre of Judah to depart, and erecting the Roman standard on Mount Zion, — all this series of events, *disturbing no man's free agency, each happening in the most natural* and apparently spontaneous manner, — for this is a beautiful feature of the divine government, that it for the most part works *with* the human will and not *against* it, — was calculated, with a wisdom which has extorted admiration of mere philosophers and secular historians, to bring upon the stage, with due impressiveness, Messiah, the Desire of the nations.

Now, I say that from these past developments we may draw a pleasant augury for the future. To an observant mind, the evidence that our moral earth, amid all its heavings and perturbations, is decidedly advancing, are unmistakable. The movement may be slow and tantalizing, but it perceptibly *moves;* and thoughtful spirits note with curious interest that every year increases its velocity. Men who think are beginning to see that there is something more in history than an assemblage of dead facts, — that there is a *plan*, a thought-out *scheme* of things, underlying the surface of events, the tendency of which is to *improvement*, *progress*, the extirpation of old errors and forms of wrong, the reign of higher

maxims, and the development of powers, which, in their full unfolding, will carry up our nature to a point at which the glowing words of the Psalmist will be more than verified: "Thou madest him but little lower than the angels." They may be slow to acknowledge that this means the coming reign of Christ. But *we* understand the matter, we *children of the book*. The oracle speaks to us in no ambiguous voice: "I have sworn by myself, and the word shall not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

> "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run;"

and the grand *te Deum* shall be taken up by universal redeemed humanity, that eighteen centuries ago was commenced by a celestial choir on the plains of Bethlehem, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will towards men."

Those very events in the church, which seem most disastrous, are in reality ministering angels, *robed in crape*, if the phrase be allowed; but not the less doing angel service; leaving, wherever they touch, like the ark in the house of Obed Edom, a blessing behind them. In early times the truth became so manifest as to become a proverb, that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," and the terrible persecutions of heathen tyrants only gave impetus to that spiritual commonwealth, which, like the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, is destined to break in pieces all other kingdoms. So, from the bosom of a corrupt hierarchy, which, only a few years

previous, had achieved a seemingly complete triumph over liberty of thought and a free gospel, sprang the glorious Reformation. Indeed, it would appear to be a ground truth and a general law, that everything fair and good in the earth is engendered, not from an antecedent fair and good, but from a turbid chaos. The temporary declensions and backslidings of Christians, for instance, excite to greater humility and vigilance their fellow-disciples, and *themselves* at a subsequent period. The final apostasy of mere nominal church-members separates the chaff from the wheat, and thus operates in a quiet, but most effectual way as a moral purifier. Even the death of eminent saints, like the bones of Elisha, carries a resurrection with it. It awakens survivors to greater activity and vigor, just as the fall of a gallant soldier induces those who had been lagging to take his place in the "imminent deadly breach." "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice."

In conclusion, let us make a due improvement of this pleasing subject. Is a divine throne in the midst of us? Then give it your faith and loyalty; be satisfied with the station assigned to you; believe that you are in the *right place*, on the very spot which unerring wisdom intended you to occupy for working out the sacred problem of life and destiny; abound more and more in the duties which become dependent creatures, — in thanksgiving, obedience, meek submission, and ardent devotion; so that, at the close of life, you will be able to adopt the language of the venerable Scottish elder in his last sickness; who, to the question

of a friend engaged in wiping the death-damp from his brow, replied: "I have not a single anxiety; the great Being has been always kind to me; whatever he has done to me was good and for my good; and why should I be afraid? I am alike *happy that I have lived, and happy that I am going to die.*"

Further, while trusting him for yourselves, look hopefully to the future in relation to mankind at large. There is a good time coming to the race; do not doubt it. You are sometimes dejected at the thought of living in a world so full of misery, sin, and sorrow; never forget, however, that it is a world full of God. All shall turn out right at last, though at present the threads are so tangled up that a vigorous faith is needed to accept the possibility of a future unravelment.

Lastly, we have noticed that there is a kingdom of grace on the earth, as well as a kingdom of providence. Then endeavor, above all things, to know whether you are real subjects of this spiritual empire. Are you going up through the wilderness, leaning on the Almighty arm of Him who died for you, whose name and memorial is King of kings and Lord of lords? Unless he dwell in your hearts by his grace and spirit, it is impossible to take any solid comfort in the thought of a heavenly Providence, or to say from the depths of a sincere and earnest soul, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth be glad." "Out of Christ," we are compelled to remind you, he "is a consuming fire."

The Source of Moral Strength.

II.

THE SOURCE OF MORAL STRENGTH.

Daniel 11 : 32. The people that do know their God shall be strong.

A LITTLE more than a century ago an ingenious and learned writer excited no little ferment in the speculative world by proposing for grave consideration the question whether a community of atheists could exist. With his usual love of singularity, he held the affirmative, and wrote an elaborate work in its defence and elucidation. Not content with asserting that men might exist in a social state and perform all the duties of good citizens without any recognition of a Supreme Ruler and Judge, he declared his opinion that a community so organized possessed many *considerable advantages*, or at least was far preferable to a union of superstitious devotees, who, while they acknowledged the existence of a God, entertained false and mean conceptions of his character. It would be foolish to deny that this part of his argument is exceedingly plausible. Between the two extremes of rank superstition and pure, unadulterated scepticism, there is probably little to choose. If from the negation of all belief, which characterizes the latter, no pleasant or refreshing fruits may be expected, what better things can be hoped from positive error concerning the na-

ture and will of the great Parent of the Universe. Is a vacant throne worse than a throne filled by a tyrant? As soon let us acknowledge that there *is no God* as call up before our imaginations a ghastly phantom, that delights in blood; a childish phantom, that takes pleasure in idle ceremonies; or a monster, who commands us, on pain of his everlasting malediction, to contradict the plainest dictates of our understanding, and belie the purest sentiments of the heart. On this topic, those who institute comparisons between atheism and corrupted theism, with a favorable leaning to the former, expatiate eloquently and amply. Superstition, say they, enervates the soul. Attacking us on the side of our conscious weakness, and awakening fear rather than stimulating hope, it paints the object which it proposes to our worship in the most gloomy colors. A God, whose holiness consists in prohibiting the gratification of inclinations he has himself implanted; whose glory is promoted by the unhappiness of his creatures; who watches over them only to mark with anger the slightest excess or omission; whose justice is inexorable, or only to be appeased by painful and expensive sacrifices; and on whom his worshippers can place so little dependence that after all their efforts they may fail in procuring his favor, and securing themselves against the unknown evils of futurity; — such is the God who has too often been seated on the throne of the universe, and to whom a large proportion of mankind have in every age rendered trembling homage. Is it wonderful that, nurtured from earliest infancy in such conceptions of the great Father of all, they should grow up into

poor, mean-hearted slaves, scarcely daring to walk upright on earth, and shivering at every unusual occurrence in nature as an omen of approaching vengeance? Such is the religion of too many even in Christian lands; a religion full of discomfort and dark forebodings, which, by its harrowing representations, changes the fair face of nature into deformity, casts poison into all the fountains of happiness, and makes cowards of the bravest hearts. Its wretched votary feels himself *unfit to live*, and yet more *unfit to die*.

But while we cheerfully concede to the enemies of superstition that in this statement, which we have put into their mouths, there is some truth, and that there are forms of that baneful evil almost as intolerable as the want of all religious principle, we would remind them that there is *a true knowledge of God*, which is not difficult of attainment, and the operation of which is as blessed as that of the other is pernicious and fatal. Happy is the community in which it flourishes and yields its appropriate fruits. Thrice happy the individual who feels its sacred influences. It exalts while it purifies the soul, and breathes a divine vigor into all its faculties. He who has come to the enjoyment of this heavenly light is like a benighted traveller, who, after toiling many weary hours through tangled forest and deep morass, the yell of some ferocious beast every moment striking upon his ear, and imagination conjuring up a thousand frightful spectres, at length sees the glorious orb of day rising, as if out of compassion upon his misery and for the express purpose of

guiding him to a path of safety. He stands erect, looks around him fearlessly, and walks on with firm and elastic step, astonished at the change he has experienced. This is the truth to the consideration of which you are invited by my text. "The people that do know their God shall be strong." They shall be full of vigor and courage. They shall exhibit, under all circumstances, a force of character, which, though exerted in a very different direction from what the world calls such, is infinitely above it in respect both to the principles from whence they respectively spring and the effects they produce.

Before, however, entering on details, it will be proper to determine the nature of this knowledge spoken of in our text, it being too evident that there is a knowledge of God which exercises no such invigorating influence on the human character.

That it must be *true* knowledge, involving accurate conceptions of the attributes, will, and government of the Almighty, we sufficiently intimated in our introductory remarks. It is not required that the ideas we have of him be *adequate*, or fully answerable to his mysterious nature. "Who by searching can find him out? Who can know the Almighty to perfection?" His pavilion is thick darkness, and the loftiest genius who attempts to rise above a few simple notions of unbounded power, unbending holiness, and goodness beyond compare, soon finds that he has no wings for such an adventurous flight. But our apprehensions, so far as they go, may be perfectly conformable to the Archetype; and in the gospel he has given such clear notices of himself as

leave every one who entertains ideas positively false, without excuse. He is there revealed as our Creator, our Legislator, and our Judge; but he is *more*. Taking compassion on our sin and wretchedness, he sent his only begotten Son into the world to redeem us from death, and restore us to a place among his sons. He receives the believing penitent as a parent his returning prodigal child, enters into covenant with him, is ever present to support him, guides, sanctifies, and in due time receives him into his heavenly kingdom. These truths, with others of a kindred nature, distinctly apprehended and firmly believed, take possession of the whole man, and become so incorporated with his essential principles of feeling and action that they cannot be separated. He views them in a light very different from that in which they present themselves to the mere speculative understanding. They are not barren abstractions, they are not cold deductions of reason which chill while they enlighten, but warm, radiant, living *realities*, which seem to exist not so much without as within him, and to be parts of his own breathing self. To doubt the existence of a supreme and everywhere-present Spirit, who is before, and behind him, who compasseth his lying down and rising up; to doubt his perfect justice, his ineffable purity, his boundless love; to doubt whether in Jesus Christ he hath reconciled sinners to himself, and is preparing for all who accept the offered grace, mansions in the skies,—is to him little more intelligible than to doubt of his own existence. Hence that beautiful and most significant term by which this perception is often ex-

pressed in the sacred Scriptures. The saints are said to "*see* God." The ideas they have of his presence, power, goodness, and the various solemn and tender relations he sustains to them, are so lively and beyond description impressive, that they may be almost characterized as *images of sense.*

And these are not occasional feelings, to which they have been wrought up by a concurrence of extraordinary circumstances. I make this remark to guard against a dangerous error into which many have fallen, the general frame of whose mind is very different from that described, in consequence of discovering that at certain periods of their lives, and in certain situations, they felt emotions not dissimilar. The idea of God is in itself so grand and elevating a thought, so calculated to rouse and absorb all the faculties of the soul, that the most carnal mind, when suitably prepared by a train of incidents, is constrained to feel and acknowledge its influence. As the giddy and tasteless traveller, who feels no sympathy with the sublime and beautiful objects in nature, but turns away from them with disgust, sometimes stumbles on scenes of surpassing grandeur and loveliness when in a state of mind favorable to receive an impression, and is astonished at discovering what a fountain of sensibility has been locked up in his bosom, — so the most thoughtless man of the world, who can pass whole weeks without one serious reflection, whose days are spent in the turmoil of business, and nights in revelling, wonders sometimes to find himself led by a sort of destiny, which he cannot resist, directly into the *presence of his Maker.* The

heaven-born mind, as if conscious of the vile degradation to which she has been reduced, and determined for once to assert her right, climbs up to her native quarry, and claims a brief communion with the Parent from whom she had so long been separated. Yes, even the besotted sensualist is forced sometimes to exclaim, "There is a God; how great, how glorious is God!" He feels himself at the foot of his throne; the world, with all its vain illusions, disappears, and he surrenders himself to a train of the most profound and affecting contemplations. These, it is true, are rare occurrences in his life; and their infrequency constitutes a broad and strongly marked, though by no means the only, distinction between his case and that of the truly religious man. The devotion of the latter is no *panic* nor sudden *paroxysm;* but an inwrought habit of thinking, feeling, and acting, in the view of that great Being whose transcendent purity fills him with adoring awe, and whose numberless acts of goodness he reciprocates with unceasing praise.

I observe, further, that, in this lively apprehension of God in his various attributes and relations, there is always a *specific personal appropriation of him.* The truly pious man is not satisfied with any attainment short of the ability to say "He is *my* God, and will be *my* guide even unto death." He has taken a close survey of his miseries and needs, and the feeling of helplessness is too intense to be allayed by vague considerations of the divine all-sufficiency. As the affectionate child regards his parent not in the light of a parent in general, or of the family col-

lectively, but as *his* parent; so the devout soul claims for himself all that God is, and all that is in God, with the same individuality of application that would be exercised were there no other being in the universe sustaining the same relation to him. If any are disposed to tax a poor, sinful worm with too much boldness and familiarity in thus contemplating and approaching his Maker, I reply that no undue boldness is evinced in claiming a privilege which is given him by covenant and charter. It is a boldness which, in a greater or less degree, all the faithful have. Witness such language as this, which we would often find on their lips if admitted to their secret privacies: "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. The Lord is the portion of my cup. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. Thou art my hope, O Lord God. Blessed be the Lord, my strength, my goodness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I trust."

The people that thus know their God shall be strong. Such a hearty recognition of the divine existence and perfections, with the holy love, fear, and confidence which are its appropriate fruits, is the true source of moral courage, and is particularly efficacious in those conjunctures which prove the weakness of all other supports.

Consider, in the first place, the firmness which it inspires under the calamities of life. None of us need be reminded that these occur with sufficient

frequency to justify a very diligent inquiry into the best methods of bracing ourselves against their violent assault; and it would be unfair to deny that many, unfurnished with principles drawn from a pious reliance on God, exhibit on such occasions a considerable degree of fortitude and self-command. There are to be found in the world men who, to judge from their bold front and lofty carriage under the most terrible misfortunes, almost justify the arrogant blasphemy of a sect of philosophers, that "the gods themselves have no power over a resolute spirit." Like certain sea-birds described by naturalists, they show the greatest alacrity in the greatest storm. The severest losses, as of wife, children, friends, property, character, political standing, in quick succession, seem to produce as little impression as a shower of stones from the hands of children would make on the back of a rhinoceros. They fall only to rise with fresh energy, and death may kill but cannot conquer them. We have all seen, I presume, these men of iron in the walks of life, and have asked the cause of their astonishing peculiarity of character. All that can be said, perhaps, in answer is, that Nature delights in *varieties*, and that, between such beings and men in general, there are original and inexplicable differences of mental constitution. The great majority of men are formed in a different mould. They are sensible that affliction has *power* over them; they tremble at its approach; and, when it touches them, they bleed at every pore. What sinking of the heart is felt at losing an only child! How does the strong man, who led a host to the

cannon's mouth, writhe under the unutterable pang of seeing the companion of his youth and the solace of his declining years close for the last time those eyes which had so often beamed on him with affection, and dispelled the gathering darkness from his brow! How tenderly do we sympathize with one another on such occasions! We feel that consolation is needed, but hardly venture near to offer it; for a something tells us that, were the case *our own*, we should be beyond the reach of human sympathy.

There are certain reflections, indeed, which men of the world affect to make on the calamities of life, which they imagine would not be without their use, if duly considered by the sufferer. They appeal to his *pride*, insinuating that extreme sorrow is a weakness of which a man should be ashamed. They tell him that misfortunes are the *common lot of humanity*, and that complaining, instead of bringing a cure, only *renders them more intolerable*. They add that evils are great in the view of the mind only because they are very *near*. All, therefore, he is called to do, is to look forward a few weeks or months, and imagine that the interval is already past. Vain words, which have never stilled a throb nor dried a tear! "Sorrow is a weakness; therefore dismiss it." Ay; but will Sorrow go? Is Sorrow conjured by such an easy spell? Let those who have made the experiment answer the question, and tell us whether they have found her so accommodating a guest. Pride and a sense of shame, I acknowledge, may operate powerfully on many as inducements to *conceal* the impression made by grief. By a desperate effort, like that

of some malefactors who have preserved their natural expression when tortured on the rack, they may establish a reputation for heroic firmness and equanimity. But the disease rages within, and, driven from the extremities, attacks with greater violence the heart. "Misfortune," continue our philosophers, "is the common lot of man." Well, so it is; but what consolation does it give the sufferer that he has companions in misery? Allowing their affliction to equal his, which, however, in the paroxysm of his grief, he will not be ready to admit,—*felt* sorrow being always greater than sorrow only imagined,—what profits him this equality? It does not diminish his loss, does not repair it, but leaves him where it found him, blasted and broken-hearted. "Afflictions are necessary and unavoidable." "Ah," says the sufferer, "I *know* it, and for that very reason I mourn. I feel myself the victim of a terrible Destiny, who hurries me along, I know not where, and mocks my impotent endeavors to escape; who hears no prayers, and feels no pity." Equally futile is the advice that we, by an effort of the imagination, conceive ourselves at a distance from the affliction, and attempt to look at it as we probably shall do after the lapse of this day twelve-month, for example. As well may we be told that we are not ourselves, but some other person. We have no such power over our imagination. Time has, indeed, a wonderful efficacy in assuaging grief; and this is a happy constitution for which we cannot be sufficiently thankful, as without it the most would be doomed to pass their lives in blank despair. But the abstract knowledge of this

psychological truth allays not the present anguish. *The time must actually elapse.* Day must succeed to day, and month to month, while the healing process is going slowly on; and, if a cure be at last obtained, the interval is as long to him who anticipated such an issue at the commencement, as to him who in his ignorance supposed that he never would be comforted.

There is another prescription warmly recommended by the worldly philosopher. Let the sufferer, after the first paroxysm of grief, plunge into the noisy whirl of business or amusement:

> "Quit the cypress groves,
> Nor to the riv'let's lowly moanings tune
> Your sad complaint. Go seek the cheerful haunts
> Of men, and mingle with the bustling crowd."

I am far from denying all virtue to this applauded nostrum. If the rude shock has left sufficient energy to make the experiment (and outward circumstances are not unfavorable), the vigorous prosecution of worldly business will certainly blunt the sharp point of affliction, and the melancholy images will gradually fade from the mind. But its radical defect is, that it promises only a *distant* cure. Instead of administering present relief, it envenoms the wound by compelling the sufferer to assume an air of calmness and unconcern, and to turn away his thoughts from the subject which engrosses his whole soul. You have all felt, in seasons of calamity, the painful violence which it cost you to resume the ordinary occupations of life, and have almost imagined that you could still be happy were you left alone with

your own sad thoughts. Whatever, then, be the ultimate effects of this expedient, it brings too tardy aid to merit the high encomiums that have been passed upon it. What is more, its operation is entirely mechanical, infusing no principles of fortitude in the soul, and teaching not to *meet* our enemy, but to *fly* from him. The man, who seeks relief from corroding reflections in the din of secular employment, plainly shows a want of internal supports, and that he is a coward in his heart.

But they that know their God shall be *strong*. They have obtained views and sentiments which the men of this generation, though they cannot fully appreciate them, must acknowledge to be blessed in their effects. How contemptible, beyond expression, appear such maxims as those we have been considering, to him who has learned in the school of Christ lessons like these: "There is a glorious Being at the head of the universe, infinite in wisdom and power, without whom not a hair shall fall to the ground. This Being is my God, whose omnipotence is engaged to protect, whose wisdom is engaged to guide me; and though he often walks in a mysterious way, not suffering his footsteps to be known, yet on his great and precious promises I lean with triumphant confidence. The afflictions of life are necessary expressions of his displeasure with my sins, but are infinitely less than my sins deserve. The present life is only preparatory to another, and these afflictions are an important part of my education. Their effect shall be certainly beneficial, and the recollection of them shall sweeten the bliss of heaven through eternity." Now I

do not say that principles and feelings like these must give the man on whom they exercise their influence an immense superiority over all others in trying vicissitudes. I affirm, they elevate him above all degrees of *comparison*, and make him a being of another order. Misfortune cannot affect him, for the very word is stricken from his vocabulary. All is *ordered*, all is *right*, all is *beautiful* and *good*. Pain, disease, loss of friends, disappointments in business, shame and ignominy, are blessings not in disguise, but each distinctly labelled "*The Medicine of a Father.*" To say that in a state of suffering the pious soul enjoys *more* of the peaceful calm of godliness than in more prosperous circumstances, may seem foolish exaggeration. But we seriously say it; and without recurring to the precious idea that God will, at such a season, communicate to his child unusual supplies of grace, we think the fact can be explained on natural principles. Affliction puts the pious soul on her resources. Knowing that her strength lies in the truths of the holy word, she betakes to them with an earnestness suited to the emergency; drinks large draughts from the refreshing fountain, and makes a full meal on the heavenly bread. She is soon and amply rewarded. Truths which before appeared little interesting, or perhaps were scarcely perceived, now stand out with inexpressible freshness and beauty. New views of God and his holy government, Christ and his great salvation, the Holy Spirit and his comforting relations, crowd upon him; possessing, however, a better charm than novelty, for they bear the stamp of that unerring word in which he trusteth.

Should we be surprised, then, to find the Christian so often declaring, not in tones of Pharisaic self-applause, but with the deepest humility and gratitude to God, that he is "exceedingly joyful in all his tribulations"? Infidels, and those of an infidel spirit, affect to deny this fact, or at least to doubt whether, if the bearing of Christians in trouble were closely inspected, it would be found essentially different from that of others; and thus all our preaching goes for mere declamation. Now I am at perfect issue with them on this point, and as it is a question *of fact* it may be easily brought to the test. I aver that there are in every village and cluster of cottages in our land some whose conduct justifies all that has been said; and if the persons with whom I argue have not found, it is because they have not sought, them. How can men who habitually turn away from scenes of sorrow, whom nothing but the last necessity compels to remain five minutes together in a sick-room of the dying, who can scarcely bear to look in the face of an unfortunate, lest they catch his gloom and melancholy,—how can such judge of the invigorating efficacy of religion? But even could they screw up their courage to visit the house of affliction, they might be led into erroneous judgment by false appearances. The pious are not fond of rehearsing their exercises on the house-top. Though they take pleasure in communicating with those who possess a kindred spirit, they abhor *display before the world*, and usually receive their careless friends in silence, choosing rather to say *nothing* than make an exhibition, or talk in a dialect which they do not understand. But

though the lips move not, the heart speaketh, and their joys are not the less pure because no stranger intermeddleth with them.

II. Let us now view this divine knowledge as inspiring with moral vigor in the discharge of duty. I believe it scarcely admits of dispute that not only is there an undue proportion of vice and disorder everywhere prevalent, but that human virtue, unaccompanied with religion, is a poor sickly plant under the most favorable cultivation. The great majority of men seem to live without any fixed purpose in view. Placed here they know not why, and going they know not where, their only concern is to spend the few years they are destined to continue in the world as free from molestation as they can. To possess a certain measure of what they call the good things of life, to enjoy intercourse with a few friends, to raise four or five children, and finally to have the satisfaction of dying in a well-furnished room in the midst of their family, seems to bound their wishes and their hopes. On this weak and narrow foundation is built the whole system of their acknowledged duty. Obey the laws of your country; if necessary, fight in its defence; abstain from injuring others, that they may abstain from injuring you; and occasionally render them assistance, that you may in turn receive it, is a complete answer to every question that can arise concerning conduct. Exceptions to this remark are more apparent than real. How few of those splendid exhibitions of magnanimity, love of right, and indignation at oppression, which grace the historic page, would, if fairly analyzed, be found to

spring from any nobler principle than the sordid love of self. Let us not wonder at this dearth of high virtue and lofty aim among creatures from whom great things might be expected. Let us not wonder that a refined Epicureanism has spread its chilling blight over the whole surface of society, killing every noble plant, and sparing only noisome and unprofitable weeds. The world *has forgotten its God*, and the curse of barrenness is upon it. How can it be otherwise? Can men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Can we expect that, without any rational motive to impel, or object to gain, such imperfect creatures as we are should seriously attempt to regulate our lives by a mysterious, abstract idea of perfection, — a perfection which will profit us nothing, and which requires self-denials, toils, watchings, and many painful sacrifices? Why should we abridge the few comforts that are attainable during our short pilgrimage? why cast away the only happiness within our reach, at the command of a metaphysical phantom? "Right, virtue, moral beauty, eternal fitness, — ye are all high-sounding words of emptiness. There is but *one* law of action, to which the whole universe is submissive. Preserve yourselves, and live while you live!" I do not say that this is the general language of men. But it is their real, practical sentiment. And this is the cause of that deplorable weakness of human virtue, — that impotence to good, combined, alas! too often, with a gigantic power of evil, — so much lamented by the moralist. Men transgress the law of their nature, because, in their heart, they acknowledge no law but conveniency; yield readily

to seduction, because resistance will cost sacrifices of present ease; and refuse to engage in hazardous and difficult duties; asking, in surprise at our demand, why they should expose themselves?

From this moral prostration there is no recovery; for this torpor of the soul's best and highest faculty there is no cure, except bringing back God's wandering creature to himself, its Creator. But this is an effectual remedy. The knowledge of God supplies exactly what is wanting to inspire man with great thoughts, and urge him on to high enterprise. It puts scorn on the miserable idea that he is here by chance or fate, and for a purpose he knows not what. It tells him that he is a favorite subject of the dread Monarch of all worlds. It puts into his hands a holy and righteous law, by obedience to which God will be glorified, and his own best and eternal interests secured. It tells him that he has a *part* to act, a *career* to run, a *destiny* to fulfil; that superior beings feel an interest in his success, and that the divine Saviour who died for him is anxiously watching his progress, and praying that his faith fail not. It tells him that, beside the internal conflict with sin in his heart, there is a battle to be fought with the enemies of righteousness in the world; and all this it enforces by pointing to the great white throne and Him who sits thereon, from whose face the heavens and the earth flee away.

It would be insulting the weakest understanding in this assembly to ask whether there be not an invigorating virtue in principles like these honestly and cordially embraced. The moment a man has felt

their power, he is *prepared for everything.* The sublime conception of being an agent of the God of heaven and earth, of his actions having such importance as to interest all heaven and deserve everlasting retributions; this alone, and unaccompanied with any other considerations, must invest him, in relation to other men, with attributes of a superior being. Thus there is implanted in his soul a strong, stubborn, unconquerable sense of obligation, which he follows wherever it leads. He can deprive himself of the most agreeable amusements; engage in the most harassing and vexatious employments; separate from friends dear to him as his life, never to see them more; pitch his tent with savages among Arctic snows; nay, offer up his body to be burned on the first conviction he is made to feel that it is *right.* If it be right to resist an oppressive government, he resists, though he finds himself alone. If it be right to submit, he lays his head at the foot of the most contemptible minion of despotism. If it be right to escape from danger, he runs backward; if it be right to expose himself, he runs forward. "He knows how to be abased and how to abound; everywhere and in all things he is instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need." Is he then a block, destitute of all sensibility to those evils which so powerfully affect other men? Far from it; but there is a principle within him superior to mere sensibility, or, to speak more properly, weaker emotions are, according to a well known law of our nature, absorbed in stronger, and the high tension of his noble faculties, produced by the all-engrossing thought of responsi-

bility to his God, suffers him not to feel what otherwise he would be utterly unable to bear.

This fully explains the maxim that religion is a tamer of the passions; it truly is so, and to a degree of which the strangers to its power have no conceptions. But it does not exterminate, nor even weaken them. It only enthrones in the heart one great master-passion to which the others yield implicit subjection, their action not enfeebled, but turned into a different channel. Sensual desires cease to be sensual, and become ardent aspirations after spiritual pleasures. Anger and revenge vent themselves in holy indignation against sin; covetousness grasps at treasures which neither "moth nor rust doth corrupt;" and ambition, its eagle eye purified of those morbid humors which disabled it from seeing the vanity of the miserable baubles which men call honors, looks forward and sees thrones and sceptres in the skies. Thus temptation loses in a great degree its power, finding armed against it not only *reason and the conscience*, but the *tastes and inclinations*, — all those impulses which, whether turned to good or evil, rule the man with unlimited sway. The objects which are ordinarily so efficacious in seducing men from their integrity, "the fading echoes of renown, power's purple robes, and pleasure's flowery lap," exercise no attractions on a subject that is already under more powerful attractions.

I well know how apt men are to discredit representations of character not supported by anything in their own experience. "Poh! there are no such men in the world," declares the infidel, with many who

think themselves not infidels. But I aver that there are many such men; and if he who denies the fact would take as much interest in reading the religious history of the world, as details of murderous battles and political revolutions, he would not need any proof upon the subject. Nay, if he would only take the trouble of carefully noting the characters and conduct of many within his own observation, he would acknowledge that there is in this thing called religion a sublime and almost fearful energy. Look at the first Christians,— a poor, ignorant, despised handful of carpenters, tax-gatherers, and fishermen, — who previous to their coming under the influence of evangelic truth, seemed wanting in ordinary and what we might call decent firmness, — who, so far from playing the desperado, almost invariably forsook their Master in the hour of danger, and in his last trials actually fled. But what a change was wrought on that memorable day, when the Spirit, coming down from on high, scattered the cloud which until now had rested on their minds, and gave them fully to know the mysteries of his kingdom! I take a single individual of the company, — that trembling coward, who, a month before, three times denied his Master, asserting, with oaths and execrations, that he knew not the man. I now see him standing like a superior being in the midst of the very multitude who had crucified his Lord, charging them with the foul crime of denying the Holy One and the Just; asserting that God had raised him from the dead, of which he was a witness; warning them to repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, and declaring that every

soul who heareth not this great prophet shall be blotted out from among the people.

Such instances show what our holy religion can do for its disciples, and present a scene full of tremendous sublimity. So its enemies felt with an intensity they could not conceal. They saw that it was stronger than death, and that he spoke the simple truth who said to them, "We can as cheerfully lay down our lives for our religion, as the hardiest philosopher of you all can put off his coat." This mysterious force, this proud, unconquerable will, as their enemies called it, to which nothing was found responsive in their own bosoms, filled them with a secret horror, and they trembled before their victims. Meanwhile the servants of God went headlong on, preaching and praying, suffering and dying, until the powers of darkness were fairly driven from the field, and Paganism sunk in the grave which she had digged for her indomitable rival. Look at the heroes of the Reformation, and ask, if you dare, whether there be a moral energy in religious truth. The language which dropped from the lips of Luther, on a memorable occasion when called to appear at peril of his life and testify before kings and emperors, was *his own;* but the glorious spirit which it breathed was only common to him with a thousand and one: "Were I obliged to encounter at Worms as many devils as there are tiles on the houses of that city, this would not deter me from appearing there." Look at the Puritans of England, those stern and unrelenting foes of arbitrary power, because it dared to bind laws on the conscience; who could die, but

could not yield; and the oppressed remnant of whom left with cheerfulness their native land to bury themselves in an inhospitable wilderness, where their God could be worshipped at pure altars and with pure offerings.

Might we not take higher ground? Were we to assert that scarcely a revolution of importance is recorded on the page of history which did not spring directly from the impulses of religion; that there is scarcely a nation but owes its character, extent, manners, and very existence to this powerful agent, would any venture to contradict me? Too often, indeed, has its might been unhappily directed, and terrible devastation has ensued. Too often has the fire of heaven been mixed with the strange fire of human passion, and the heterogeneous compound has produced explosions which have shaken kingdoms to their centre.

But, while I grant this, I demand, in turn, the concession that the *true* and *pure* knowledge of God is no way accountable for such disorders. Let us not suffer ourselves to doubt that under wise direction it is the most safe, as well as potent of all engines for meliorating and exalting the condition of men. Christians know more than this. They know that it is destined to revolutionize the world and restore it to more than paradisiac innocence and beauty.

In their present efforts to accomplish this blessed consummation, we perceive another and most illustrious proof of the moral efficacy of our holy faith. Scarcely in the days of the apostles and primitive martyrs, and certainly at no time since, does my

text *seem* to have received a more striking commentary. A few years ago the opinion began to excite attention and obtain general currency, that it was the duty of Christians to evangelize the world; and stupendous as is the enterprise, ridiculous as it may appear in the eye of reason, — enlightened by faith, they have actually, under the promptings of that stern sense of obligation which I have illustrated, girded up their loins to the work. Already so much has been done that the infidel dare no longer sport his horse-laugh; and though he still speaks sarcastically of these strange, sanguine men, who intend converting the nations by missionaries and Bibles; yet we suspect he is beginning to wonder with some mixture of awe at their stubborn fixedness of purpose, and even to suspect that they may finally attain their object. Here he is right. The object shall be attained. The work is of God, and his people have entered upon it with an intensity of spirit which proves that no opposition shall prevail against it. The genius of Christianity hath risen from the dust, and shaken off the dews of the night from his locks. He is marching over mountain and flood, the olive-branch in his hand; his paths dropping fatness on the pastures of the wilderness; springs of water gushing out from beneath his feet, and the little hills rejoicing on every side. The great ones of the earth may combine to arrest his progress, but in vain. The powers of darkness, repeatedly discomfited in times past, shall suffer a more complete overthrow, and from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the Lord shall be great among the Gentiles, for the

mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. "Great is the truth; and it shall prevail." It is stronger than all things: "all the earth," — to use the beautiful language of an apocryphal writer, — "calleth upon it and heaven blesseth it; all works shake and tremble at it, and with it is no unrighteous thing. Wine is wicked; the king is wicked; women are wicked; all the children of men are wicked, and there is no truth in them; in their unrighteousness also they shall perish. As for truth, it endures and is always strong, it liveth and conquereth forever more. She doeth the things that are just, and refraineth from all unjust and wicked things, and all men do well like of her works, and she is the strength, kingdom, power, and majesty of all ages. Blessed be the God of truth."

I conclude with addressing a few remarks to the two different classes of which my audience is composed.

There are doubtless some present who can bear practical testimony that I have not been reciting a cunningly devised fable. There are some who have felt the value and divine efficacy of the knowledge of God in various trying situations, — in deep affliction, in sore temptation, and in what at the time they deemed mortal sickness. In no emergency has it failed you, Christians, when its assistance was solicited. It was a friend when no other friend was near, guiding you through many a perplexing labyrinth, warning against the snares laid for your integrity, and whispering hope when, to all outward appearance, hope was clean gone forever. While you think of this, and your hearts swell with gratitude to

God for the bestowment of so invigorating and cheering a companion, I beseech you to hold fast to it, and not to let it go. Cultivate with increasing zeal and devotion this most blessed of all sciences. The acquisition, as you know, is easily made, requiring no intricate calculations, nor toilsome and hazardous experiments. It is cheaply made. In one little book are contained all your treasures, and they are there so admirably disposed, unfolded with such happy perspicuity, that a child can draw them forth and put them to practical use. Believe me, if you apply yourselves faithfully to the study I am recommending, you will be repaid with usury as you advance. Your bread shall not be cast upon the waters, to be found after many days, but shall return immediately in enriching blessing. The time may be at hand when you shall feel the need of all your spiritual resources. There may be conflicts to endure, which you cannot at present imagine, and compared with which all your past trials will sink into utter insignificance. Prepare for such an hour!

You who have not the knowledge of God, I would affectionately exhort to consider what has been said, with attention and candor. I cannot but think that your hearts have acknowledged the truth of our statements. Yes, you acknowledge, for you cannot deny, that the sincere and honest Christian has infinite advantages over you. Already, and more than once, have your principles failed at the time when their support was most needed; and what can you hope in the future but similar disappointments? You have not yet weathered all the gales of life. Perhaps

the heaviest is to come. Why do I say *perhaps*, when I know that you must *die?* "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Alas! Man is weak, and God alone is strong. Make yourselves, then, acquainted with this great Being while the opportunity is offered. Lay hold of his strength, and be at peace with him.

God neither Tempts, nor is Tempted.

III.

GOD NEITHER TEMPTS, NOR IS TEMPTED.

James 1 : 13. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.

THE facility with which men violate the laws of God, against the clear light of his holy Word, is very remarkable, but not more so than the dexterity they evince in concealing from their own hearts the turpitude of their conduct. A man giving himself up to vicious indulgence seldom fails to bring over his *understanding* to the side of his lusts, whether the gratification be great or small,—catching flies or a midnight murder. How easy, for example, does he find it to consider his sins as *misfortunes* rather than crimes, deserving commiseration instead of punishment! How easy to transfer the blame from himself to another! Nay, he sometimes, with a horrid arrogance, raises his puny arm against the heavens,—scornfully retorting the charge of criminality, and impeaching God as the author of the very ills on which he has denounced his malediction.

A tendency to this vilest of all heresies made its appearance in the days of the apostles, which gave occasion to the remonstrance of St. James in the text: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted

of God." Mark the energy with which he rebukes the sentiment: "*Let no man.*" — Let it not enter the heart nor escape the lips. It is an insult to the perfections, a deadly blow at the existence, of the holy and supreme Ruler of the universe. This is the doctrine which shall now engage our attention, and I shall not insult your understanding by dwelling on its great importance. When firmly established in the mind, it will prove the strongest inducement to holiness and the most effectual antidote to the love of sin. Besides, to believe that God has no participation in our crimes is to feel our own *inexcusableness;* and this is a lesson which *must* be learned. "Every mouth must be stopped," etc. Without it we are altogether unprepared to receive the transcendent gift of redemption through his dear Son.

Before enforcing the thought of the apostle, let me briefly show that such an exhortation is needed, — that the disposition to charge blameworthiness on God exists and betrays itself frequently where it is not suspected. It will thus appear that we are not attacking a phantom or man of straw, but a real and tangible evil.

That men are prone to charge God with an improper agency in sin clearly appears from the light thoughts they entertain of the *evil* of sin. It is very evident that their conceptions of its turpitude are in general low and inadequate. They think it a *small* matter, and that which strikes them as the greatest paradox in the Bible is its stern denunciation of endless wrath on every soul that doeth evil. How is this propensity to think lightly of the greatest of

curses to be explained? These men have no such contemptuous ideas of sins against civil society, as murder and rebellion. Why, then, should they imagine that transgression loses all its venom the moment we view it as committed against the greatest and most exalted of Beings? The fact is, they more than suspect that *God himself* is the Tempter. Could they be convinced that he is infinitely removed from aiding and abetting their crimes, they would see the force of the terrible delineations of their turpitude contained in the sacred record. But, secretly cherishing the idea of his virtual coöperation, it is not surprising that they find a difficulty in believing it to be the object of his abhorrence.

The fact under notice is proved by another reigning disposition of men, — their propensity to blame God for their *afflictions*. The true cause of all suffering is sin. Sin is violation of the law of God. Now, were transgressors fully convinced that the purity of the Deity startles from everything like abetting rebellion against his own authority, they would see in the severest of their sufferings nothing more than a righteous retribution. It is the thought that God is the cause of *sin* which makes them repine at his being the cause of *suffering*. They view him as they are taught to view the devil, — as first tempting them to transgression, and then taking pleasure in inflicting pain on account of it. Hence their fretfulness and rage under trial. Hence their daring and almost blasphemous challenges of the Deity: "Why hast thou dealt with me thus?"

But, to settle the matter at once, I appeal to con-

science. Are there not many within the sound of my voice who must acknowledge that their hearts cherish the unworthy conception rebuked in my text? What mean all those apologies and explanations which are so often found on their lips? This man pleads in self-vindication the force of his passions. He was born with such impetuous desires that, poor, unfortunate creature as he is, he cannot resist them. Another explains his misconduct by his circumstances in life, well remembering (for this is the essence of his plea) that *God only* orders the lot. A third talks of the attractiveness of the forbidden object, leaving us to answer the question *ourselves*. Who gave it its seductive charms? Our bountiful Parent has stored the world with blessing. He has commanded his sun to shine, given fragrance to the rose, carpeted the earth with verdure, and made the very food we eat a medium of pleasure. His ungrateful child professes that this exuberance of goodness has spoiled him; more than insinuating that if he had been placed in a wilderness or dungeon he would have proved a much better and more estimable character. Is it not so? I ask you to investigate the point each for yourselves. You may be making this foul charge, though not aware of it. It is a solemn truth that men do not know their own malignity nor the dreadful workings of depravity within, until the declarations of the word of God force them to rigid self-examination.

We proceed now to establish the doctrine of the text, "Let no man say he is tempted of God." And we shall do it by a threefold appeal to his character,

his laws, and the powerful motives by which he has enforced obedience.

In every trial between man and man, it is usual to attach very considerable importance to the character of the parties. If the person accused has hitherto sustained the reputation of an innocent and honest man, a presumption exists in his favor of no trifling weight. If, besides, he has long been illustrious for dignity, talent, and high moral worth, the first among the first in every honorable enterprise, so that when the eye sees him it blesses him, and the widow's heart sings for joy, what a noble field of defence opens up before an eloquent and able advocate! If it appears, also, on proof, that his accusers are mean and profligate wretches, who, at war with virtue, are discharging their venom on one of its most distinguished living examples, actuated by sheer malice and the desire to obtain unlimited license for their own abominations, would anything be wanting to complete his vindication, and overwhelm with scorn the ruffian conspirators against his spotless fame?

Now, let us apply these analogies to the case before us. We are engaged in trying an accusation of the great God by sinners. The characters of both are fully delineated in the oracles of truth. It is established, in the first place, that the former is the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity, of a purity so bright that the "heavens are unclean in his sight, and his angels are charged with folly." Arrayed as he is with infinite wisdom and power, his holiness is his favorite attribute, the very diadem of his glory. Reason itself attests this truth. As the idea of a Supreme

and Eternal Being seems to be a part of the mind itself necessarily evolved in the gradual development of its faculties, so perfect, unspotted rectitude seems an essential part of that idea. We cannot separate it from the notion and definition of a God for a single moment. Conceive, if you can, of a malevolent, cruel, treacherous Deity, and you will next be able to conceive of luminous darkness, unextended space, a three-sided circle, or any other palpable contradiction. Such a sentiment is a pitch of extravagance far beyond Atheism, for though men may be found who deny the existence of a Creator, they will cheerfully concede that, the point of his existence being demonstrated, he is a Being necessarily and infinitely perfect. "If there is a Power above us (Atheism itself acknowledges), he must *delight in virtue*."

This, then, is the established, the conceded fact; and on it we build our plea for the injustice of all those insinuations which represent him as tampering with the sinner in his trespasses. Can the same fountain send forth sweet waters and bitter? We may find ourselves embarrassed in explaining many parts of his conduct. We know that he did not prevent the entrance of sin; we know that he still permits it. These difficulties might have weight, had we not certain evidence of character, that sin is in diametrical opposition to his essential nature. This being so, we must cast doubt to the winds, and believe that all the intricacies of his procedure are perfectly consistent with the most amiable goodness, the most untainted righteousness. What would become of the most exalted innocence among men, if every

slight appearance was tortured into an argument of guilt?

There is another consideration well worthy of notice. It is the dictate both of reason and revelation, that the Deity is happy in and of himself. He cannot, therefore, propose any *profit* by going out of his own natural character, and inducing his creature to violate the rule of righteousness. Is it for his interests that his attributes be exposed to foul dishonor; that the harmony of his government be disturbed; that his creatures, whom he formed for himself, should raise the standard of opposition, and overspread his fair domain with treason, anarchy, and blood? Let these considerations be put against all those false and delusive colorings which a corrupt imagination delights to throw around his conduct.

Let us next inquire, who are the accusers? Our sinful hearts. And have not these been long known as interested, unprincipled impostors, ever ready to call things by false names? Do they not lie and mislead us every hour in matters of the smallest and greatest moment? Mark with what dexterity the vilest criminal on earth takes hold of everything in his favor; and how, even after receiving the sentence of the law, its justice approved by all who hear it, he pleads his innocence as if he were certainly in the right, and the whole world was certainly in the wrong. Let us remember that the heart of every sinner has a *deep interest* in making out the charge that God is the tempter. It is well aware that if success crowned the attempt there would be an end of responsibility, an end of crime, an end of punish-

ment; that full license would be given to riot in all that is unholy and vile. Let it be driven out of court, therefore. Let its mouth be shut. Let not its whisper be heard in this important question.

This is our first plea; and we direct you, secondly, to his laws. Were the chief magistrate of the commonwealth impeached for sowing disorder and vice through the state, and seducing, by all methods in his power, the subject into evil courses, it is obvious that one point of severe inquisition would be the *laws* enacted during his administration. These are the formal expressions of the ruler's will. If, then, it could be shown that the whole of his legislation had been distinguished for administering the wisest checks to vice and the strongest encouragements to industry, virtue, and social order, a defence would be set up not easily shaken. But is not such the character of the laws of God? Are they not holy, just, and good? Who will dare to affirm that they sanction in the least degree any of the disorders of the human heart? As to the idea, sometimes insinuated, that he may, by a secret agency, contravene his own laws, it has not the shadow of foundation. We have seen that he has no *interest* in contravening them. His character forbids it. Why, then, should a thought be cherished so derogatory, I do not say to his holiness, but his *power?* for who made him so dependent on his subjects that he finds it necessary to equivocate and secretly work against his own edicts? Lying is the offspring of *weakness*. *Power* never lies. And yet you will indulge in suppositions that make the great God contradict himself, and fal-

sify like the very weakest of mankind. And what necessitates this absurd alternative? Nothing more than the idea that there are certain *appearances* which cannot well be explained without imagining some degree of agency on his part in sin; as if there were not a thousand appearances, not to say certainties, on the other side, which have infinitely higher claim to our respect.

Lest, however, any one may allege that the laws of God are mere dead letters, while all the powerful inducements to action are favorable to disobedience, we call your attention to our third plea, namely, that God has not only guarded the interests of holiness by good laws, but has proposed the strongest possible *motives* to obedience, and the strongest possible *motives* against their violation. Here we pierce the very core of the foul charge against the Deity. When men of licentious opinions represent him as tempting to sin, their meaning is that he proposes motives alluring to the commission of it by the exhibition of a certain good to be obtained, and certain evils to be avoided. Now, if it appears that he does not; that the motives he presents to his love and service are immeasurably *greater* than all on the side of transgression, the question is put to rest, and the cause of God completely triumphs. On this point, what more needs to be said than that he has sanctioned his laws by denunciations of everlasting punishment, and promises of eternal reward? No one can evade their force by pretending doubts concerning their reality. They are most *clearly revealed*, not in whispers, like the dark, ambiguous oracles of

a pagan temple, but in thunder, like the law from Sinai. They are also sanctions equally fitted to all mankind. Amidst the great variety of temperament among men, it is very possible that inducements which, when presented to certain minds, are almost resistless, may to another be no inducements at all. Here is one great defect in human law: with all their good-will and dexterity, legislators find themselves unable to devise sanctions of *universal* application; and here the excellency of those provided by our Divine Lawgiver, that as all men have the same fear of misery and desire of immortality, all are equally capable of appreciating the threatened ill and promised good.

It may be said, perhaps, that motives drawn from the future worlds of happiness and misery are not so well calculated as *some others* to come home immediately to the bosom; that temporal rewards would have possessed much more efficacy; that the argument, therefore, from the profusion of eternal sanctions is defective, — it being still true that God has not done what he could have done to deter men from unholiness. In reply to this, let us for a few moments allow that no sanctions, but those drawn from eternity, are provided, — nothing being promised or threatened in the life that is; the question fairly presents itself, why are not these sufficient? why do they not come home immediately to the bosom? Will any one who hears me say that they are unadapted? Shame on the assertion, if it be made. You feel that you were destined for immortality. Every desire and instinct of the soul bears witness

that yours is a nobler prerogative than that of the beasts that perish. What motives, then, are so well calculated to exercise a controlling influence as those related to that future existence, which a still, small voice within has long taught you to anticipate? You say you cannot grasp eternity in your contemplations. Present retribution is something tangible, with which you feel entirely at home. But of the world that as yet is not, the world beyond the grave, no effort of imagination can produce a lively impression. I will not deny the truth of these assertions; but allow me with all candor to state why it is that you find yourself so indisposed to appreciate eternal rewards. The reason is your degradation by sin and sensuality. You have so long been content to hold exclusive converse with the objects that are seen and temporal, that your mental vision has become dimmed; you cannot look beyond the vicissitudes of the present transitory scene; you cannot believe in a hell, because you do not *feel* it; you cannot credit an eternity, because it is not yet *begun*. But this debility of spirit, this slavery to present impressions, is not the work of God. He created you with an understanding capable as well of reasoning of the things that will be, as comparing the things that are. He gave you the imagination, on whose eagle wing you could soar far above the miserable objects which engross your regards, hold communion with angels round the heavenly throne, and look down the horrid steep into the dungeons of despair. If these powers you have neglected to exercise, and by consequence the talent is withdrawn, the fault is your own. Inability

to grasp the sanctions of eternity is only another name for low carnality, — a rooted opposition of heart to contemplations worthy of your rational nature.

But it is time to attack the principle on which the whole of this pretended reasoning is founded, namely, that the temporal motives to a course of sin are more powerful than the temporal motives to holiness. We deny it, and affirm that, limiting our view within the narrow horizon of this life, God has provided every security for virtue, consistent with the probationary character in which we at present stand. We wish to make every reasonable concession. We allow that this is not our rest; that the rewards of obedience bloom in the upper paradise, where alone they can be plucked and enjoyed without a tear; that, on the other hand, God does not recompense the sinner with the full harvest which his crimes are preparing. Still we hold that the general arrangements of Providence are such as to honor with decided preference a holy life. Endeavor to divest yourselves of the illusions created by the glare of outward splendor, and meet with true philosophical impartiality the question, whether the votary of virtue or vice enjoys the greatest amount of substantial happiness, and you will find a superiority on the side of the former, which, previous to examination, nothing would have induced you to believe. As to the happiness derived from God's good creatures, he has it, and in the *best way too*, in proper subordination to more exalted felicities. What gratification of sense, intellect, fancy, is enjoyed by the most dainty epicure, which the pious man has not? The former relishes savory food; so

does the *latter*. His palate possesses as delicate sensibility; his eye as eagerly takes in the beauteous prospect; and his ear is equally ravished with sweet sounds. All his holy dispositions combine to fit him for enjoyment; his humility makes every blessing tenfold more delicious from the consciousness that it is not deserved; his temperance preserves him from that painful nausea which is a constant tax on immoderate indulgence; his love to his God gives ineffable beauty to the meanest objects, because he sees in them all the impress of his heavenly Parent's beneficence. He can take delight in listening to the hoarse music of the tempest, as well as the melody of the grove; in winter's snows, as well as summer's green, and autumn's sober gray; because of all he can exclaim, "They are thy works, Parent of good!"

Even amid the most trying afflictions, — disappointments, sickness, old age, — he has a fountain within that is incessantly sending forth waters of refreshment, a uniform flow of cheerfulness and satisfaction that makes a perpetual feast. Memory calls up in review the pleasing picture of the past; Faith stands before him, like the angel of light, and turns the shadow of death into morning.

The sinner, on the contrary, is never at rest, never happy. When deprived of the opportunity of gratification, he tosses like a wild bull in a net; and even when he enjoys, enjoyment soon palls, and he runs from object to object as if heaven had cursed him with a thirst never to be satisfied; and, verily, *this curse is on him*. God has so constituted blessings of an inferior nature, that, in the very fruition of

them, we are taught to feel the necessity of a better and more enduring portion. Thus it is, that the worldling, in the midst of all his pageantry and splendor, when he turns within, finds emptiness and an aching void. To this must be added, what is more terrible than all, the upbraidings of an accusing conscience. Ah, could we look within and hear him in his self-communings, when all around seems gayety and joy, we would often be surprised with the doleful exclamation, "If this be happiness, God, what is misery?"

But why, it may be asked, is there *any* enjoyment connected with sin? Why is not every unlawful indulgence instantly followed by *pure and absolute misery*, giving to the pious man, not a superiority only, but a *monopoly* of happiness? If, for example, our food, the very moment we abuse it to gluttony and drunkenness, became wormwood and gall, the arrangement would be unexceptionable. But such is not the constitution of things. The objects of sense still remain tempting, and impart pleasure, long after they have begun to be abused. To this I reply, that though man may violate the law of his being, it is not to be expected that God will in turn violate the order *he* has established. He has given to the various objects around us the power of communicating a certain kind of enjoyment. This is a great general law, and though he might by his omnipotence change their nature, yet he will not break in upon the uniformity of his works and ways to accommodate the sensualist. He will not, in other words, by a miracle, change wine, that "maketh glad the heart," into

corrosive sublimate, on the uncorking of the second bottle. Besides, allowing that he *did so*, would the cause of holiness be profited? It would check, indeed, the outward exacerbations of the fever of depraved desires, as the sinner would be made to feel at once the pain of stepping beyond the bounds of rectitude; but it would have no effect on the disorders *within;* he would still be the slave of appetite, though he could not gratify it; his virtue would be the offspring of a restraint which he abhors, and in every respect he would remain a lover of the creature more than a lover of God.

Here we might leave the subject. Yet, as we have undertaken to vindicate the ways of God against the hard speeches and thoughts of men, it seems not improper to notice the favorite argument which they employ in support of the accusation, and which has served to thousands in every age the office of a staff in the down-hill course to perdition. The argument is, that to the Author of our nature may be justly imputed the moral character of the acts of his creatures, for *he gave the principles in which they originated.* He implanted those passions from which, as from a fountain, proceed the bitter streams of iniquity. "God knows," they continue, "we are poor creatures; have been guilty of many disorders, and fear we shall be guilty of many more. It appears destined that it should be so. We were created with such an excitable, nervous organization, with so many and impetuous desires, that we are entirely unable to resist. Our hope is that He,who formed us as we are, will make tender allowance for our in-

firmities." Such is the happy scheme by which they attempt to make their intemperance, their gluttony, their covetousness and lust, a partnership affair between them and the Almighty.

All the disorder that exists in the soul proceeds from the helpless bondage in which Nature — Heaven save the mark! — has placed us to the passions. If they rage and turmoil like furious beasts, it is by virtue of the power which the Creator gave them. It is our part to submit. Their force is irresistible. We have no bridle they will obey. So pleads the sot so long as he can wag a tongue, and hold a glass to his head. So talks the debauchee. The murderer belongs to the same school: he is a most docile and obedient pupil of Nature. It is always at *her* voice that he whets the dagger, and drives home the ball, — always!

Let me briefly point out the gross sophism which lies at the foundation of this atrocious calumny on God and man. They pretend that, as the passions are a component part of our nature, so blind obedience to them must be obedience to nature. But these, we beg leave to say, are two very different propositions. That they *belong* to our nature is freely granted, but we utterly deny that they are our *whole nature*. They are the motive-powers of the soul, the grand incentives to action, without which man would be a stock, his life a "waveless calm, a slumber of the dead." There is, however, at the same time, a *directive* and *guiding* power, of which the system of these gentlemen very conveniently takes no notice. Man has the noble faculties

of reason — conscience — freedom, which stand at the helm, regulating the onward movements, checking, moderating, stopping them, and preventing excess and wild disorder. To follow nature, then, is not to be the blind, submissive slave of impulses, but to follow them as directed by their appropriate and legitimate master. Indeed, it is this which constitutes the great distinction between man and the brute. The latter rushes on his object with headlong impetuosity, intent only on satisfying the all-engrossing inclination of the moment. Man, with the same eagerness of desire, can *pause*, *deliberate*, compare the future with the present; and, by calling up the awful forms of duty, honor, and retribution, subdue the most raging storm of appetite. Facts without number prove that this part of our mental nature is not so incurably wild and savage as some suppose, — that it can be made to obey as well the bridle as the spur. The rudest aboriginal of our western forest often does violence to his natural impulses. With all his characteristic thoughtlessness, he is seen almost every day sacrificing, under the influence of reflection, the present to the future. Give him a quantity of food merely sufficient to satisfy present hunger, informing him, at the same time, that no more may be expected for two days, he will *divide it*, reserving a portion for the following day, though his craving is scarcely in the least diminished. In other words, the superior power of *reason* steps in, and pronounces the expediency of denying himself to-day that life may be sustained to-morrow. His *dog* would *not* act thus; and here is just the difference

between man and the dog. Now, if hunger and thirst, the most untamable of all appetites, can be thus controlled, why should we deem it impossible to contain within bounds others less importunate? What impulse is there so violent that it *must* be obeyed? Not avarice. Craving as it is, and mean in the prosecution of its schemes, it can do without its idols. Not love. Occasionally, indeed, it turns the head of some silly, novel-reading boy, but its stings are seldom mortal; and though in his romantic frenzy he terms the beloved object his universe, his heaven, his all, facts prove that he can suffer the loss of her without serious inconvenience. Ungratified anger seldom kills a man. Deprive him, in the most furious paroxysm, of all opportunity of wreaking it, and you occasion only a little overflowing of bile into the gall-ducts. Indeed, it is extraordinary what small circumstances sometimes domineer over the most violent passions, and on what slight occasions a man exercises his natural authority over them. I presume there is not one man in a hundred, who, when grossly insulted, could not restrain himself in the presence of a lady. The most shameless profligate would decline perpetrating certain descriptions of crime before the eyes of a little child. How promptly does the young drunkard, in the midst of his boon companions, throw away the cup when told that a father or guardian is at the door! What more evident, then, than the fact that there is a power *superior* to impulse, — that, if the passions are wild beasts, as is sometimes represented, there is a God within man that can enter the cage, beard the lion,

trample on the tiger, and bring them purring and crouching at his feet. So far from being masters, they can be made humble servants at will of this superior faculty. Nor has it entirely lost its authority in the most abandoned. It survives the most destructive process, and shows, in the most debased, that it was born to command; for where is the wretch who does not sometimes deny himself at its warning voice? In a virtuous and well-regulated mind it reigns supreme. One word from its throne can hush the most furious agitations of passion into a holy sabbath-calm. Some of you are acquainted with many beautiful historical illustrations of this; and perhaps the chief value of history consists in the lessons it exhibits of the power exercised by virtue over the soul in most adverse circumstances. You have read, doubtless, the beautiful anecdote concerning David in the book of Kings. Exhausted with fatigue and thirst during a severe battle, he expresses his desire for a little water, which could only be obtained by passing through the camp of the enemy. Three of his captains rise, rush through the hostile phalanx, and return with the water in a helmet. The king receives it; but, struck with the heroic affection which had encountered such dangers for his sake, instead of satisfying his thirst, he dashes it on the ground, exclaiming, "Be it far from me that I should do this. Is not this the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" A similar incident is recorded of Sir Philip Sydney. Being mortally wounded and carried off the field, he earnestly demanded a little water. On its being brought, and while in the act of touch-

ing it to his lips, he perceives a wounded soldier gazing at him with a look which told how he coveted the refreshing beverage. He puts away the untasted cup, and commands it to be presented to him, saying "Poor fellow, he needs it most." Let such ennobling facts as these decide the question whether man is the helpless slave of appetite.

But they are not the *only* facts on this subject. Not only does history abound with instances of men who, under the sharpest irritations, have resisted the impetuosity of passion, but of men who, by cultivating the divine faculty of self-command, have created within themselves *second natures*, and have become remarkable for virtues directly opposed to the vicious inclinations which seemed a part of their original constitution. Thousands and thousands, who by temperament were sensualists of the lowest grade, and seemed born to wallow in animal enjoyment, have become models of a most elevated and austere morality; thousands, who, by complexion, were turbulent, fierce, irascible, have, like our immortal Washington, changed themselves into doves and lambs, — proving that the heaven-born soul is *its own* master if it only chooses to exert the mastery. Away, then, with the hideous notion that our Creator has placed us under the fatal necessity of sinning.

They who reason thus are like an ignorant rustic, who, gazing at one of those magnificent floating palaces which darken our rivers, would infer, from the explosive energies of the mighty agents employed in propelling them, that certain destruction would result from their action. But he does not see the

stupendous balance-wheel that gives order and regularity to the general movement. He does not see the woodman adjusting the fuel, the engineer at the safety-valve and stopcock, the master at the helm; else his alarm would be changed into rapturous admiration at the spectacle of so tremendous a mass obeying the commands of a pigmy, five feet high, with the docility and promptness of a child, — advancing, retrograding, stopping, turning to the right and to the left, as his sovereign will directs. Such is human nature. The passions are the moving power, the fire, and the steam. The soul, in her higher faculties of reason and conscience is the woodman, the engineer, and the master at the helm. Let them be faithful to the high trust committed to them by the Creator, and moral disorder will be banished from the earth. If they choose to forsake their post, dreadful will be the consequence; but no blame will attach to the wise and mighty Architect. Of all this we have a witness in our own breasts. We are conscious of mental freedom and power of self-control, and have therefore the same proof of its reality as of our own existence. Hence that feeling of remorse, which is inseparable from every criminal act, and bids defiance to all the speculations of an atheistical philosophy. Stand aloof from the jargon of muddy, scholastic disputation, and listen to the voice of your own hearts. You will have the best answer to those wretched sophists who would cheat you out of your religion, your immortality, and your God.

The improvement to be made of this subject is the establishing in our minds a firm conviction of the

righteousness of God in all his dealings, and especially in the denouncement of his wrath against sin. The great Being with whom we have to do is holy. He hates sin; he has no fellowship with it. It is that foul stain upon his government which can only be washed away by a deluge of wrath. And shall we, with this truth staring us in the face, nurture in our bosoms the accursed thing,—the only thing in heaven or earth the Deity disclaims as his work? Are there any who are endeavoring to find an excuse for their offences in the idea condemned by the text? We warn such that they are mistaken, and that their deceitful sophistries may be their ruin. Believe me, you will find the blame of your sins your own exclusively, and this blame shall be peculiarly aggravated by the fact that you have rejected One who has offered to save you from their dreadful consequences. Seeing, then, that you are still within the reach of mercy, make it your great, your chief concern to avoid so tremendous a condemnation.

The Great Problem.

IV.

THE GREAT PROBLEM.

Rom. 5 : 12. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

IT is a fact, confirmed by the whole history of man, that we are born unholy and depraved. There are lodged in the heart strong and ungovernable propensities to sin, evincing their existence so early, and so universally, that we can hesitate as little in ascribing them to nature as the appetites of hunger and thirst, or the emotions of joy and grief. Amply, however, as experience and the Word of God support the doctrine of native depravity, it is calculated, on its first exhibition, to surprise, to disconcert us. Here is a whole race of immortal beings poisoned in its source, the victim of some strange malformation, we may almost say, in the mother's womb. That misfortune should pursue the evil-doer, is the obvious dictate of reason; but that evil should erect her throne in an unoffending world, — that its inhabitants should be deprived of the chance of earning, each for himself, a more favorable allotment, by a misfortune experienced *at birth*, is a riddle which we cannot but feel a strong desire to see expounded.

The enlightened heathen of antiquity spent many

a weary hour in speculating on the problem, but to little purpose. Some of them had recourse to the doctrine of the preëxistence of souls, — supposing the present ill-estate of human nature to be the effect of sin committed in a previous life, of which all remembrance was lost. A strange method, you say, of untying a knot. But make charitable allowance, if you please, for inquirers situated as they were. Illumination from the sempiternal source was denied them. The problem they undertook to resolve was beset with difficulties, and, if they resorted to extraordinary methods of solution, it shows how seriously they were perplexed. The most fantastic errors of the human mind have often a noble source, — originating in an honest and earnest desire to expound the mysteries of the universe.

Others took refuge in Manicheanism, or the doctrine of two eternal principles. Not conceiving it possible that a just Being would allow the present state of things to exist, had he power to prevent it, they supposed that a good and evil God coexisted with each other from all eternity, between whom there was a continual conflict, in which the *latter* had sometimes the upper hand. The question, therefore, whence comes corruption of nature with all its attendant evils, met a prompt reply. The benevolent Oromascles was foiled by the accursed Ahriman. Thus did heathen philosophy toss and flounder, — "in endless mazes lost" — certain of the fact that she stood in the midst of a ruined world, but unable to explain it on any solid or satisfactory principles. Among the many blessings we enjoy as Christians, it is not the least

that we have a clear historical if not metaphysical solution of this interesting problem. "By one man sin entered into the world." "In Adam all die." "The judgment was by one to condemnation." "By one man's offence death reigned by one." "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Nothing can be more transparent than the meaning of these remarkable passages. They establish, beyond the possibility of doubt or evasion, a moral as well as natural union of the most vital character between the human family and their original parent. His conduct and destiny have immediately affected the conduct and destiny of his descendants. This is the key to the dark chambers of death, surveyed in our last discourse. We do not say that the explanation answers every question which curiosity and a prurient fancy may ask. But it is enough for practical purposes. At least, the mind finds in it a *point of rest*, where, wearied with the vain conjectures of reason unenlightened by faith, we may calmly repose in the hope of further developments in the world of light.

Without entering into a regular disquisition, we propose offering a few general thoughts on the subject, which may be of use to minds not fully established in the belief of what we consider an important if not fundamental article of our religion.

In searching out the relations which the first man sustained to his posterity, we naturally turn with interest to the historical records concerning him in the book of Genesis. Opening the volume, our eye immediately falls upon a series of interesting transac-

tions in which he makes the principal figure; and the inquiry suggests itself what precise character he sustained in them. Must we view him as standing alone in his individuality, or as personating the whole mass of life that was to proceed from his loins? The latter view is undoubtedly the true one. In all that is recorded as given to him or said and done by his Creator, *the race was considered*, — not the individual; *mankind*, — and not the man. We allow no exception, not even his name. The word "Adam" is not, as many suppose, a proper name expressing his single personality, but that of the *species*, which had a complete existence in him before the birth of any descendant. Nor can we doubt that by this fact, — the fact that a common and not a particular designation was given him, the Creator adumbrated that great law of propagation which holds universally in the kingdom of organic life, *similia ex similibus*, "*like from like;*" in other words, the shoot receives from its parent stock a common nature. But let us notice a few other particulars recorded. He was formed in the divine likeness. Gen. i. 26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness." No one surely discovers here any singular prerogative which should distinguish Adam from others. The high honor referred to was put upon the *species*, as the apostle Paul expressly informs us. The next thing recorded is the blessing pronounced upon him (verse 28): "And God blessed them and said, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." Doubtless this was a benediction on the whole of the great family of man, who are here addressed in the person of

their common father. A third circumstance is the power and dominion imparted (verse 28) : " and have dominion over the fish of the sea and fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth on the face of the earth." No one can think that this magnificent grant was made to Adam alone. It was a national charter, conferring rights and immunities on the whole community of human beings. When God presented him with Eve, and instituted marriage, announcing that " man should leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they twain should be one flesh," our Saviour tells us distinctly that his descendants were contemplated equally with himself. The like must be said of the institution of the Sabbath.

Now, it were not a little strange if, while in every other recorded transaction he stood forth as the public head and type of his species, the interdict of the tree of knowledge of good and evil respected him only in his *individual capacity*. But we are not left to conjecture. It is just here that we have crowded upon us the most decided proofs of his representative character. After he committed the act of transgression, the offended Lawgiver confronted him and pronounced a sentence, every word of which, as experience proves, was a death-knell to unborn millions. To the woman he said, " I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception." How many beside the mother of all have felt the bitterness of this entail ? To the man he said, " Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." But where do we read that, when the old

man laid his weary head in the dust, earth recovered her paradisiac bloom and Eden smiled again? There is no mistaking this matter. The original penalty is felt every day in the sorrows of female conception,—in the subjection of the whole sex among by far the greater part of Gentile nations, approaching to absolute bondage,—in the barrenness of the soil, the difficulty of procuring subsistence, and the final return of the jaded, mortal body to its native dust. And if that part of it which is visible and temporal be thus fully executed on the collective family of man, we can hardly doubt that it is condemned to drink of its moral ingredients. The *visible* is to the thoughtful spirit, God's solemn language conveying the *invisible*. He who reads aright the volume of external nature can discover in it hidden meanings, which concern far higher interests than those of our gross corporeal nature. Let the honest and calm inquirer read the subsequent history of the book of Genesis in the light of these remarks. Let his thoughts fix on that most significant declaration, "and Adam begat a son in his own likeness,"—as illustrated in the murder of Abel by an infuriate brother; let him follow the progress of the hapless race from one measure of iniquity to another, till "God repented that he had made man," and then let him draw his own conclusions. To my mind, the doctrine we are illustrating seems to be taught in the Mosaical record almost as clearly as that of creation itself.

It may not be uninstructive to observe, that the principle of government on which it rests is recognized in other connections; nay, we find it in almost

every page of the Old Testament annals. To what were the Jews indebted for the privilege, enjoyed so many ages, of being God's peculiar people? To their connection with believing Abraham.

On account of the sin of Ham, the posterity of Canaan were doomed to perpetual servitude. How many youth, and new-born infants perished in the waters of the deluge, and in the fires of Sodom! The crime of Achan was so charged on the whole people of Israel, that they were made to sustain a bloody defeat. Look at the same people at another period of their existence. Eighteen hundred years ago, their rulers crucified the Holy One, accompanying the act with the horrid imprecation, "His blood be on us and on our children!" And have they not been taken at their word? Are not their posterity a nation scattered and peeled, meted out and trodden down, the most woful spectacle the world can produce, of a race forsaken by God? With innumerable revealed facts like these, why should we stumble at the primitive imputation? They are fair analogies, proving how the great Legislator administered his code of laws. They give us the *usage of government.* It inflicts consequences of misconduct on whole masses who are connected with the original offender. We may dislike the fact, and thunder against it with all the rhetoric at our disposal. But *there it stands*, in the book of revelation, and, as we shall soon see, also in the book of nature, — grim, if you please, but substantial, not to be conjured away by epithets, or the pious exclamation, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" Doubtless the final issue will prove that God can take care

of his own character, and effectually vindicate this, as all his other ways to man.

We shall call your notice, for a few moments, to another aspect of the subject. Our doctrine demands assent by a claim of *necessity;* no other hypothesis, of the least plausibility, even attempting to explain the present condition of the human race. Allusion was made to this in our prefatory remarks; but it deserves more than incidental notice, being an argument which no sophistry can evade. That our condition in the world is not a happy one, and that the infelicity commences very early, will not be disputed. The first cry of the infant, on leaving its mother's womb, is a cry of pain, as if it foreboded the evils that were to come, and the dark shadow of the future already rested on its spirit. It is the subject of many distressing maladies. Convulsion racks its limbs, — burning fevers dry up the springs of life, — usually, too, its death-agonies are more intense than those of age more advanced. But these are comparatively *trifles*. It is the subject, as we have seen, of a *terrible moral disease*, which never fails to develop itself in enmity to God, and alienation from all that is good. I say, then, and say it with all confidence, that the constitution under which we are placed is a melancholy one, and to represent it otherwise is an outrage on common sense.

The question, then, fairly meets us, — whence this abnormal, disjointed state of things? — and must be answered in one of the three following ways. Either it originated in the sovereign will of our Creator, or must be the result of our own misconduct, or must

be traced to that of our first progenitor, in whose day the evil undoubtedly commenced. With regard to the first, no man can bring himself to believe it seriously. What! the present system that which came originally from the hand of God, and which he pronounced *very good?* Impossible! The thought that a benevolent and holy being could place immortal creatures in so false and unhappy a position — *from the start* — without any previous reason, but merely to display his arbitrary power, is perfectly shocking. I tell the Almighty he has *no right* to create us as we are. He must be a monster, a demon, a very personification of the Manichean principle of evil, if he found it in his heart to send forth such an abortion into the theatre of existence. Shall we say, then, that the evil is caused by ourselves? Impossible! we are *born in it.* The fatal contagion seized us in the very article of conception. Nothing remains but the last alternative, so amply confirmed by revelation, that, being federally united with the sinning progenitor of the race, we come into the world blighted and fallen creatures. We do not say that this explains the whole mystery of the subject, but it is satisfactory *as far as it goes.* It declares that our unfortunate family was once under a fair and reasonable probation, — that our fates were entwined with one possessing every qualification of a representative, and that the great Legislator acts rightly in enforcing the consequences. Hence it is, that from the moment of existence we are treated as out of favor and fellowship with him; "the streams of his goodness," to use the language of another,

"have been intercepted; the healthful influences of his spirit have been withheld, and the soul, once a beautiful living temple, is now a shattered ruin; the lamps extinct; the golden candlestick displaced; the altar overturned; the sacred incense, which sent rolling up to heaven its rich perfume, changed into hellish vapor."

Talk not to me of creating sovereignty being the cause of all this: I laugh at the explanation. But I bow reverently at the thought of its being induced by the delinquency of a covenant head, after a fair trial, in violation of a solemn compact, in which Divine Wisdom saw fit that I should be included. This is the whole doctrine of our fall in Adam. It does not *create the evils under which we groan.* The evils exist, whatever doctrine you adopt. *There they are*, around you and within you. The only question is, does it furnish the solution of them? and I say, boldly, that, reason itself being judge, nothing has ever been thought of which deserves to be named on the same day. What comparison between it and that, which would resolve the whole matter into arbitrary sovereignty, asserting that no sad catastrophe has occurred to affect human destiny, but that all things go on as from the foundation of the world?

We shall now offer a few observations in answer to objections; for it is not to be denied that prejudices against our truth are found to prevail extensively; though we have never seen the man, who, closely pressed, would not half acknowledge that the belief of it was a logical necessity, — a belief from which he could not escape. The objections may be all re-

duced to two. 1. Transfer of penal consequences to those not actually guilty is unjust. 2. It is capricious and arbitrary, answering no valuable ends.

As to the former, we shall not yield to the temptation of entertaining you with metaphysical subtilties, being well satisfied that they are not profitable in establishing the truth of God. They bring it down from the lofty vantage ground it occupies as a revelation from heaven; and, in general, perplex more than they enlighten. We hold that the infinite Being is himself the most competent judge of what is just and unjust, and shall never allow ourselves to declare war against a fact in his moral government, because we cannot reduce it to harmony with our maxims. Now, we tell these objectors, that they are *attacking a fact.* Dare they deny that man comes forth to play his part in the universe under a malignant planet, — under circumstances the most unpropitious to his happiness that can well be imagined? Bear in mind what has been repeatedly asserted and is beyond denial, — that we are *corrupt* from the womb, that we *agonize* at the mother's breast, that we *die;* and when we live to be capable of intelligent action, we are the slaves of impulses which we cannot govern, and which invariably bring forth fruit unto death. The alternative is then before us. If God has not visited us with these calamities for the sin of Adam, he inflicts them *for no sin at all.* The present universal state of the human family is an accident. Nature determined the question of its destiny, by the tossing up of a copper, and unfortunately it turned up

tails. Is such a theory an improved conception of the justice of the holy One? To treat a race as depending for the development of its capacity for happiness on the conduct of him with whom they are so intimately united by the law of organic life that they derive existence from him, and may be truly called a part of himself, is very unjust. They cannot think of such a thing; but to *maim*, and *torture*, to *shut up* in darkness and pollution; to *exclude* all fair chance of rising to a better condition, for no reason whatever, but caprice, — the "so I will, so I order," — of a despot, is the quintessence of equity and benevolence! If this be *rationalism*, then let my place be among the bigots.

In meeting the charge of injustice, we must observe, further, that the objector betrays singular ignorance of what every day passes around him. The position on which he bases his reasoning may be carried out, for aught we know, in the planet Herschel, or the fixed stars, but leads to endless absurdity when applied to our little ball. It is, that every moral being *should stand or fall, be happy or miserable, on his own account*, without the least respect to those with whom he stands connected. This is his maxim. To treat intelligent creatures as in a state of complete isolation from one another, as simple *units*, or monads, each standing apart, like a marble statue on his own pedestal, is an imperative and eternal law of divine equity. But can any one, possessing ears and eyes, maintain that our world is thus governed? Say it, and you say that there is not a man, woman, or child who receives

from the Supreme Being anything like *fair treatment*. We gave examples a few moments since of the representative principle in holy Scripture; we now say, they are found everywhere in human life. All owe their well or ill being to causes *out* of themselves — to the previous agency of individuals over whom they had no control, and by whom their earthly destiny was decided before they saw the light. The health and happiness of children depend on the behavior of parents. Not to speak of the transmission of temperament and constitutional qualities, — which is a fact as well established as any in science, — if the latter are rude, and devoted to criminal pursuits, we anticipate with confidence approaching to certainty that the former will share in their misery and misconduct. The prosperity of nations depends on institutions which originated ages since with men whose very names are forgotten. All the wars and bloodshed which have turned the earth into an Aceldama, may be traced to a few ambitious ruffians, whom Providence permitted to sway the destinies of their fellow-creatures. It might seem odd to say, that there are hundreds of thousands in our country, suffering at this hour, and a still greater number prospering, in consequence of something done nearly two hundred years ago, by a royal profligate (Charles II.) in England. But the oddness disappears after a moment's reflection.

So it is. Our interests are affected in innumerable ways, from innumerable quarters, and often the most trifling share in the agency is *our own*. If you have the least doubt of it, answer two or three queries.

Who are you; and *why* are you what you are? To what is owing your respectable station in society, your literary attainments, your religious training, your hopes of salvation, — everything, in short, that makes up your stock-in-hand of privilege and enjoyment? Doubtless you see the hand of God in the disposal of your lot. But how did he execute his designs? Through the instrumentality of *others*, and so entirely that you dare not, in a single particular, boast of being the carver of your own destiny. The thought is humbling, but instructive; and should always be called up when we feel disposed to take a little complacency in our own virtuous achievements. You regard with loathing that bloated ragamuffin, who staggers past you in the street, poisoning the air with his pestilential breath; yet it would not be safe to try conclusions even with him on the score of that kind of merit which justifies a boast. To all you say for yourself, the poor loafer could reply in the words of the gallant Irishman, who, on being taunted by an English soldier because his army had suffered a defeat through the misconduct of the leader, answered, "Give us your general for an hour, and we'll fight the battle over again." Exchange parents with that living corruption, — I mean, of course, suppose the exchange, — and where would be that pious and fat old gentleman to whom the whole community look up, — so happy in his worldly estate, so happy in his religion, in his children, and looking so happy at this moment in his well-cushioned pew?

Such is the constitution under which we live, — a constitution of mutual dependence and intimate con-

nection. We are not separate and isolated individuals, — single atoms floating in the immensity of the universe, — but branches of one common stock, members of one great body, so that, if one suffers many suffer with it. It might have been otherwise. We might have been created independent of each other; but at what a cost! Have you counted the cost? Society could not have existed; for society rests on mutual dependence. There would have been no paternity, no brotherhood, no friendship, no family, no sympathy, nor reciprocal aid. Man would have been a solitary, sullen, selfish creature, a stranger to the joys arising from the commingling of heart with heart and the intercourse of congenial souls. God determined otherwise. He determined that we should be *one;* consisting, indeed, of many parts, but these parts indissolubly *joined together.* With this view, he gave us unity of physical origin, making of one blood all nations of the earth; and, to show how fully he would carry out the intention, he united us in the universal father of the race, as our great moral head. If the system has its disadvantages, it, on the other hand, works out inestimable benefits, and the evils will be corrected at the proper time. At any rate, *it is the system*, and let not the clay say to him that formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?"

The second objection which we propose to consider is that the constitution of things supposed is arbitrary and capricious, answering no valuable ends. "There seem no good reasons for God's departing from the principle of making responsibility depend on personal

agency. What was gained, by ordaining, that we should be implicated in the consequences of guilt not our own?" To this it is obvious to reply that, were the divine purposes wrapt in impenetrable darkness, it would be no argument against *a fact*. Far from us be the presumption of picking flaws in the work of our Creator, or insinuating how much better a system he would have contrived had we been admitted to his cabinet council, with our square and compasses and perpendicular lines.

But we are far from granting that no valid reasons appear why he chose to base his dealings with us on the principle of representation. On the contrary, we see a *fitness* in it, an absolute *magnificence* of design, which attracts our wonder and praise. Look at it in the two following aspects, and then judge whether we are sporting paradoxes. First, its efficacy as a great moral lesson; secondly, its connection with the wonderful display of the divine perfections in the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ.

As to the first, all must acknowledge that no object can be conceived more worthy of the Divine Mind than providing intelligent agents with a sufficient quantity of motive to obedience. It will be allowed, also, that the most powerful of all motives are those derived from the *evils attending disobedience*. The more impressive the exhibition made on this subject by the lawgiver, the more clearly his subjects see that sin is an *abominable*, an *infinite evil*, — the greater the security that they will not yield to its seductions. Now, what a terrible exhibition of its workings have we in the fact that "by one man sin entered into the

world, and death by sin." The eternal degradation and punishment of apostate angels is not to be compared with it. Each of *them* fell by his own personal delinquency. Sin, under such circumstances, did not appear *infinitely sinful*, because it wrought no effects beyond the solitary individual by whom it was committed. The penal consequences, being thus bounded, could not teach what was so important to be known, — the *boundless* malignity of moral evil. But see how the defect is repaired in God's transactions with our race. Here we discover that sin is indeed an evil thing and bitter. We see that one act of disobedience can ruin not an individual, but a *world*, and *a thousand worlds*, if closely enough connected to admit a transmission of the poison. We should certainly form awful ideas of a drug, if told that one grain would not only kill a man, but his posterity to the remotest generations. Such is the truth which our doctrine teaches; and who knows but that the peculiar way in which we are propagated, by succession from a single individual, was ordained *with a view* to this astonishing display? May not the physical law be only the established mode of carrying out a far higher idea which occupied the Divine Mind? Thereby a union was formed with the original head, which allowed our participation in the consequences of his probation, and room was made for a decisive experiment how far *one unholy* action could extend its desolations. Thus it is, the world still suffers and groans from the taste of a fruit. Six thousand years have rolled away; but the deadly mischief has not abated a jot, nor will it as long as sun and moon

endure. What a lesson to the universe! What solemn and salutary thoughts does it excite!

Let me suggest a few reflections on the connection of our doctrine with that of our redemption by Jesus Christ. The relations they sustain to each other are so intimate that we do not hesitate to say our fall in Adam may be considered one of the most precious truths of our religion. It explains, at first sight, the mysterious fact that God had mercy on us in preference to apostate spirits; and it casts a flood of light on the method he chose to adopt.

Why did he pass by myriads of superior beings, whose original transgression was not greater than that of man? We deny not that there is sovereignty in this remarkable discrimination; but we also say there is adorable wisdom and equity. It was fit that, if any species of lost creatures become objects of forgiving mercy, those should be chosen who had fallen not by their own personal transgression, but *the disobedience of another*. Justice would be more willing to relax her claims in such a contingency; the example of forgiveness would not operate so injuriously on public order; and the holy inhabitants of heaven would not be so much astonished at the exaltation of polluted beings to their own felicity. Infidels affect to deem the Bible representation very strange that the Almighty manifested such sympathy with the ills of our muddy planet, but felt no relenting towards the sons of the morning, who dwelt in his immediate presence. Here we have the key. Perhaps there is not a district in his extended empire under a constitution rendering it *so proper* to depart

from the awful, but necessary maxim, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." There is no danger, therefore, that the example here set of pardon will be abused, — that any of God's moral servants will flatter themselves with impunity in wickedness, because salvation has been extended to mankind. They see that our condition is altogether *peculiar;* in some regards, truly *pitiful.* How deeply must the thought affect them, that when the Infinite One illustrates his unbounded mercy in forgiving, he allows it to flow out only on a single description of beings, — those miserable by imputed crime.

We observe, further, that our doctrine illustrates the method by which the designs of mercy were accomplished. "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." He became our sponsor, or representative, assuming our penal obligations, by the fulfilment of which we are accepted as righteous before the divine tribunal. Does this seem an extraordinary transaction? It might be thought so in a *world of angels*, standing on their separate personality. *But it is the very thing for us.* In this very way the fatal disease entered. "By the offence of one, many were dead; by one, the judgment came upon all unto condemnation;" and the physician resolved to show his divine skill, by changing the poison into a remedy. The representative principle was adopted because it *already had been acted on.* God determined to prove that, if it once wrought fatal evils, it could be made the most effectual instrument of happiness to creation, and of glory to his own great name. Out of the lion has

come forth honey; the bald spot has been covered with a laurel wreath; the fruit of the forbidden tree is turned into the balm of Gilead; our bane into our medicine; our death into immortal life. It is probable that the tempter well knew the connection existing between Adam and his future posterity, and thought, when the former yielded to his seductions, that he had achieved a splendid victory. In imagination, he beheld millions and millions prostrate at his feet, and under the eternal malediction of high Heaven in consequence of this brilliant *coup de main.* But how did God bruise the head of the old serpent, — how did he confound him in his own counsels, when it appeared that his success opened up a way for the most magnificent display of the divine perfections that has been ever given to the universe, and the restoration of fallen humanity to honors far more exalted than had been lost! The poor fool was caught in his own toils, and became the principal agent in producing that state of things which issued in his total overthrow by the manifestation of God's Son in the flesh.

See, now, what a gain has accrued to the cause of good from that constitution which to our poor, limited understandings seems so mysterious. Had it not been adopted, we have every reason to think that no place would have been found for God's last and crowning work. The plan of salvation, in which more of the divine glory appears than in all other works combined, would never have been formed, and heaven would have lost its loudest, loftiest anthem: "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins

in his own blood, be glory, and honor, and power." Here we close, trusting that you have not only received an impression favorable to the truth of our doctrine, but a deep conviction of its value and importance.

You see that we have not been disinterring for your inspection a corpse that has been lying six thousand years in the grave, an old antediluvian fossil, sapless as one of Ezekiel's dry bones, and bearing no relation to the system under which we live. It is a truth of *flesh*, *blood*, and *sinews*, all palpitating with the spirit of life, and immediately affecting your Christian privileges and prospects. In all essential features the two great economies of sin and redemption correspond to each other, and illustrate the sublime unity of idea which pervades the government of God. The whole of the chapter from which our text is taken shows how entirely the soul of the great apostle Paul was penetrated with this thought. He presses it, iterates and reiterates it with endless variety of expression: "By one man sin entered into the world." This explains, too, why the orthodox, as they are called, have always contended for our doctrine as a cardinal article of faith. They instinctively felt that it was needed to explain the deep and universal apostasy of human nature, which, wanting this historical support, lay open to many perplexing questions. But, more than all, its momentous bearing on the only foundation of their eternal hope made them jealous over it with a godly jealousy. Experience proves that the sensitiveness is well grounded; for the fact admits not a doubt that

the arguments employed against our fall in Adam aim a deadly blow at the vicarious sacrifice of Him who hung upon the tree.

Let us improve the subject to the confirmation of our faith in the gospel. Let us thankfully accept the mediation of that glorious second Adam, who, by his spotless merit, restored that which he took not away; "more than repairing the evils occasioned by the first." How foolish to spend our precious hours in cavilling at the constitution of things, which brought disaster, while one is offering itself to our acceptance fraught with immortal blessing! You do not like your connection with the first parent. Well, who asks you to like it? God does not. As if in kind anticipation of your dislike, he has given you another. Detach yourself from it this very day, this moment. Cut loose from that barren stock, whose branches yield only thorns and briars, and be united to the living vine. Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you have had more than enough. "Behold the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God, bearing all manner of precious fruits, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations."

The Blessing obtained by Fraud.

V.

THE BLESSING OBTAINED BY FRAUD.

Genesis 27 : 35. And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.

N many parts of biblical history, you perceive that the sacred penman contents himself with relating facts, unaccompanied by any commentary of his own; in this respect differing from the modern historian, who usually expresses his judgment on the record, intersperses reflections, moral, philosophical, or political, and thus succeeds in displaying himself as well as his subject. This almost bald simplicity of the ancient writers may be attended with either good or evil results. The good are these, — that we are led to think out the matter for ourselves, and are compelled, in so doing, to increase the diligence and accuracy of our examination. More is left to our own intelligence, which by this exercise is sharpened and invigorated. An evil consequence is the danger of approving the actions of good men in every case where the historian has not marked them with an express and emphatic note of disapprobation.

The paragraph just read, narrating how Jacob obtained the blessing by fraud and subtilty from his father, is a striking instance of this. No censure is

passed upon it by the inspired historian, and an inadvertent reader might view it only in the light of a juvenile prank, displaying considerable ingenuity of contrivance and dexterity of execution. But a little close attention will correct the idea. The writer does not stop to descant on the guilt of Jacob, or treat the reader with sage moralities. Yet the subsequent history plainly discovers a just Providence punishing his sin, and reads to us a lesson as impressive as if the words were written at the close of every sentence, "See the baneful effects of fraud and falsehood." Let us attend to the story with a view of gathering up some of its practical teachings.

We find, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Genesis, that Esau and Jacob were twin-brothers, concerning whom, in answer to the inquiries of Rebecca, their mother, God declared that "the elder should serve the younger;" which was remarkably fulfilled in their posterity, many years after. Mark here, that it may *please* God to announce, beforehand, events which are locked up in the mysterious future; but it must not therefore *please* us to procure by crooked and improper means the accomplishment of the oracle. He does not give prophecy as a chart for direction, — in other words, as a rule of monarch conduct. His purposes shall be accomplished in his own time and manner. But this is *his own* affair. He addresses us in one unvarying strain, "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

As the brothers grew up, we read that Esau was a skilful hunter — a man of the field; but that Jacob

was a plain man, that is, of a quiet and domestic turn, dwelling in tents. Isaac, it is further narrated by the historian, in his beautiful, naive, and simple way, "loved Esau because he did eat of his venison: but Rebecca loved Jacob." Most true is it, that the foundation of the most serious errors in life are often laid at a very early period. "The entire man," as a great writer observes (Tocqueville), "is to be seen in the cradle of the child." Parents are sadly disappointed in their offspring, and troubled till their dying day, through a cause which they little suspect. They complain of their children, when perhaps the children may have far more reason to complain of them. They have indulged an early partiality, based on no just reasons, which has been productive, on each side, of the worst effects. There is but one true ground of preference with respect to children, namely, that of real moral worth. Isaac and Rebecca thought, or at least acted, otherwise. Much of their unhappiness in the world, and the family discord which produced it, were referable to foolish preferences founded on points of difference almost ridiculously trifling. Isaac loved Esau because he had a sweet tooth to Esau's savory game; Rebecca, Jacob, because his temper and habits led him to be much with her in the house. The one was mother's pet; the other, father's darling. When will good men and women learn to watch their prejudices, their caprices, and their passions?

We approach, now, a transaction circumstantially related in the chapter under our notice. Jacob comes "with subtilty" and obtains the blessing from

Esau. The pious father was at this time far advanced in life, being more than a hundred years old, and his eyes were dim so that he could not see. Uncertain how soon his death might take place, he determined on giving his solemn and prophetic blessing to the eldest son. His wife, — a woman of remarkable shrewdness, abounding, if not in wisdom, at least in mother-wit, and, as is usual with such, was always about, — hears him express his intention, and all her feelings in behalf of mother's own boy are called forth with painful intensity. Hitherto her partiality had, we may suppose, displayed itself in trifles, though often producing mischief. Now, however, when a special temptation occurred, — a crisis, as she thought, either for good or evil in his destiny, — she proceeds to work out a favorable issue at the expense of truth, justice, honor, and common honesty. We are to judge of the evil of our passions, not by the effects they have actually produced at ordinary times, but by those which *may* be developed. The cockatrice in Rebecca's bosom began now to hatch an egg of respectable dimensions. It was obviously her duty to leave in the hands of the great Disposer of events the fulfilment of his own pledges. But she persuaded herself that the decisive hour was come. *Now or never.* In half an hour Isaac would give the blessing to that ungainly redbeard, who would never sit with her in the house, and poor, dear, dutiful Jacob would be nowhere. What *shall* she do? Not a moment must be lost. The divine purpose to give the latter superiority would, she thought, excuse a certain degree of

finesse. She meant to further the scheme of Providence, to help the Lord out of a serious nonplus and quandary. But she forgot that the divine intentions are no criterion of moral obligation, and that God may as severely punish the man who *executes*, as the man who *opposes* his will, if each is alike acting in his own spirit, and pursuing his own ends. There is something truly curious in this exemplification at so early a period of the "*manifest-destiny*" scheme of morality, which has wrought so much evil in society.

To resume the narrative: our heroine, having formed her plan, imparts it to Jacob. Naturally, like an affectionate child, he falls in with it. Scruples would indeed obtrude at the first presentation of the infamous project; but interest, that golden bribe, whose seductions so few withstand, would plead irresistibly on the other side of the question. How awfully does selfish greed pervert the judgment, and palliate the worst actions! His scruples not being obviated at once, his mother is not afraid to urge him on by a speech of singularly bold profanity: "Upon me be the curse, my son, only obey my voice." What a position this for a mother! We see her in circumstances humiliating indeed! Playing devil to her own child; urging him to a vile fraud on his dying father and perfidy to his brother, and using all her maternal authority to ensure compliance: "*Upon me be the curse.*" She little thought of the meaning in these awful words at the time; but in due season it was effectually brought home to her. Cursing is a poor trade at best, and the dealer in it seldom thrives,

whether it is directed against others or himself. Usually, like the chickens, it comes home to roost. Prepared by maternal instruction, he goes in, disguised, to his father. Here, we soon discover that sins are seldom solitary, and one transgression, by a natural propagative virtue, begets a whole family. He adds hypocrisy to fraud, and palpable lying to deceit. "How," asked the old man, "is it that thou hast found the venison so quickly?" and Jacob said, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." How shocking does wickedness appear arrayed in the garb, and using the language, of religion! The young villain is not satisfied with casting dirt on the gray hairs of his earthly parent, but he must lie, unblushingly, to his Father in heaven. He carries through the business with a great display of piety, — looking devoutly up to the skies, and praising the Lord for his goodness in sending him a fine, noble deer so quickly. Oh, the contemptible sneak toward a poor, blind old man; but impudent, brazen-faced bully to his God! It may be thought strange that his fraud should be accompanied with so needless an aggravation as amounted to absolute blasphemy. But it is not unnatural. When a man has fairly made up his mind to play the knave, he often finds it quite convenient to play the blasphemer also; endeavoring, by solemn grimace and a hypocritical parade of devout words, to inspire confidence. Hence the remark frequently made, and containing some truth, that there are persons against whom we should never be so carefully on our guard, as when they begin to look sentimental, and to talk religion. The

principal use these people make of the Almighty is to *cheat by him.*

Hastening to the conclusion, without enlarging on the dexterity with which the smooth-skinned young impostor counterfeited his brother's natural shag, we find the whole scheme succeeding to a marvel. Deceit, falsehood, and profanity obtained the blessing. But short is the triumph of injustice. While the patriarch's benediction was yet sounding in Jacob's ear, the fear of the approach of Esau, the stings of a guilty conscience, and the apprehension of consequences taught him how like a fool he had acted, with all his scheming and worldly shrewdness. He, moreover, soon discovers that his success will embitter not only the whole of his own life, but that of his parents. The contriver of the fraud was deprived of her favorite child for the remainder of her days. *She never saw him again!* Instead of being the stay and consolation of her declining years, he was a stranger in a foreign land, banished from home by means of an act of sin. How unblessed the blessing which it cost so much to obtain! Instead of the elder serving the younger, the latter is a poor, wandering exile, in constant terror of his brother. In all places, and at every moment, he feared to encounter him; and not only so, but at every step he is pursued by the retributive justice of Providence. Mark this: first, he who had imposed upon his father, was himself imposed upon by his uncle Laban in the circumstances of his marriage. Next, the jealousies and variance of his wives, Leah and Rachel, with their eternal jangles, must have re-

minded him forcibly of his own want of brotherly affection. In addition, continual feuds prevailed among his children; and he who was most loved by the father, was hated by the rest. At last, he was the dupe of an imposture more successful than his own. Joseph, his beloved, was sold by his brethren into bondage, and reported to be slain by a wild beast. When, at a later period, he found out the trick — oh! did he not think of the venison and the unfortunate Esau? In a word, his life was one long misfortune, an almost unvarying scene of domestic trouble and vexation, which had their origin, either directly or indirectly, in this most unhappy step. At the close of life, he is heard exclaiming: "Few and evil have been my days," and he might have added "I am a melancholy example of deviating in life's early morning from the path of simplicity and virtue."

On the history brought under review, we offer the following reflections: —

1. Many of the most serious evils in life must be traced to parental mismanagement. This topic has been already alluded to; but it deserves more formal notice, because it is not sufficiently appreciated. There are apparently so many ways of explaining the sins and unhappiness which prevail, without one's obtruding himself into the domestic circle in search of causes, that we are apt practically to ignore its agency in the formation of either worthy or unworthy character; and yet, slight reflection will convince us that the mightiest of all engines, both for good and evil, is at the hearthstone. In truth, the responsibility of parents is immense,

and not to be estimated. On their conduct and example, we do not scruple to affirm, is depending, in a good degree, the destiny of all committed to their charge. None of us need to be reminded of two venerable maxims constantly quoted, even by those who can quote nothing else, "The child is father of the man," and "Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." The habits engendered in infancy and youth, are far the most permanent, and carried from the nursery into active life. It is then only, if formed badly, we see the mischief that has been done. Now, if parents, instead of directing their endeavors to root out the germs of vice and misery, so thickly planted in the heart as if by the hand of nature, rather make it a business to cultivate and mature them, turning the family bosom into a hot-bed for the ignoble purpose; — are they not acting the part of *murderers* before God, chargeable for all the disorder and wretchedness which are the consequence? Let me give a specification or two.

I suppose one of you to be the father of a numerous family; unhappily, you have fixed special regard on a certain member of it, who, in consequence, grows up pampered with vanity and self-conceit, is haughty to his equals, arrogant to his inferiors as to social position, and odious to all with whom he has intercourse, by his intolerable egotism. But are not these dispositions the source of most of the unhappiness that prevails in the world? and can you expect that, after having made it your study to plant them firm and deep in the heart of the *boy*, they will cease to trouble the *man*, and make him a trouble

and pest to others? Will the pettishness, insolence, revengeful temper, selfishness, and ungovernable will, which your constant indulgence has nurtured, take wings and fly away at the moment he leaves the paternal mansion? If you think so, you know too little to be a parent. The last occupation you are fit for is begetting sons and daughters. His bad propensities will continue with him as sure as there is a God in heaven. He, whom you made vain, unfeeling, passionate, overbearing, under your roof, will be vain, unfeeling, passionate, and overbearing under *all other roofs;* and before you die you may hear him curse you for making his coffin; or, possibly, your system of favoritism may operate exactly as it did in the case of Isaac and Rebecca, — producing jealousy, and contention among your children: Jacob opposing himself to Esau by cunning, backed by the strong head-piece of his mother, and Esau opposing himself to Jacob by superior strength, receiving what assistance could be rendered from his honest, but weak old father. Thus, training them up to savageness and contempt for the tenderest bonds, I ask again, do you think that when fairly launched on the tide of life all this will be left behind, and they will start up models of peaceableness, meekness, and kind affection in their intercourse with those about them? It cannot be. You have sowed seeds which cannot be eradicated. If they do not ripen into a harvest of sin and suffering, thank not yourself, but the restraining grace of God.

I have dwelt principally on these suppositions, — on the one infirmity of parental *favoritism*, — because it

is the prominent feature of the case narrated in our text. But there are legions of others which have a fatal influence on the destiny of children. Take heed, then, how you discharge the important obligation resting on you as heads of families. The life of your children is bound up in you. God only knows what may be the effect of a single error!

2. This history calls our attention to the important maxim, that no end, however good, will sanction bad ways of accomplishing it. Jacob had the fullest reason to believe that God had ordained him heir of the prophetic benediction. He did not sin in desiring that the decree should be fulfilled, nor would he have sinned in endeavoring to compass the fulfilment, if he had done so in an honorable and pious manner. But, unhappily, he persuaded himself, as I have said, that the decree was the *rule of his duty*, and authorized any measures that would prove successful. The holy God, in no case, permits his creatures to trespass on the eternal canons he has given them for their direction. He may, oftentimes, from sin and disobedience, raise to himself a revenue of praise, procuring invaluable benefits to the church and the world. But this is no justification of the instrument. The murder of Jesus conferred the most illustrious benefit on the world that the world has ever received. But this did not excuse the wretches by whom the bloody tragedy was enacted. We have a *law*, holy, just, and good; and rigid obedience to this is both our duty and our interest. The man who commits an outrage on it, under pretence of good intentions, pollutes himself with a

double guilt. First, he breaks the rule of life, and, secondly, he adds to this the foul crime of hypocrisy and profanation in holy things. Were I called to point out the greatest abomination, as well as meanness, that has ever disgraced civilization and nominal Christianity, I would, unquestionably, name that system of pious frauds, as they were called, which was adopted in the early times of the church, and is not yet entirely extinct.

I am aware that certain cases are supposed, by a certain class of ethical writers, not remarkable for the strictness of their principles, with the view of showing that it is sometimes lawful to commit unlawful deeds in consideration of the end. Thus, we may sometimes tell a lie: to the madman, for instance, in order to his preservation; to the robber, who has received your promise that on condition of being released, you will transmit a sum of money; to a man pursuing with deadly intent an enemy, that he may be put on a false scent, and not discover his victim, etc. See, now, what these casuists do. To establish a foul and most pernicious principle, which, in its practical working, overturns the whole structure of moral obligation, they bring up certain extreme suppositions, which, like earthquakes, deluges, and volcanic eruptions, are not realized thrice in a generation, or perhaps a *century*. In this way, there is no misconduct so vile that it cannot be glozed over by a third-rate advocate. Rapine, murder, treason, perjury, — everything, in short, that excites horror in a virtuous mind, — can be, and has been transformed by the villanous plea of necessity into

positive virtues; or, at least, harmless peccadilloes. Take an example out of modern history. When Napoleon Bonaparte carried on his campaigns in Egypt, he took the city of Jaffa, — the garrison of Turks, who had defended it (nearly five thousand in number), surrendering their arms on the express condition, formally accepted, of receiving quarter and good treatment. Napoleon's army was not at that time very amply provisioned, though not suffering. It was not thought convenient to feed so many useless mouths, nor was it deemed wise to let the poor wretches run. For these reasons he determined, *four days* after they were taken, and when the heated blood of his soldiers had become perfectly cool, to massacre them all; and the thing *was done*. Nearly five thousand helpless prisoners were, on the fifth morning, taken out into the field and slaughtered as they stood, by volleys of musketry, continued for three hours, until not one was left alive. Every man was basely, brutally, devilishly murdered,—resistance being impossible, because, relying on Christian honor, they had not only given up their arms, but submitted, not dreaming of danger, to have their hands confined with ropes behind their backs. Yet, such is the besotting influence of hero-worship on weak minds, that a reverend scribbler, in one of our fashionable magazines, came out not long since, the unblushing justifier of the whole transaction, — denying not *one of the facts*, but pathetically appealing to the ugly gash which five thousand live Turks would have made in the Frenchmen's rations. I must observe, however, that, in this horrible atrocity, there was

exhibited no peculiar, and hitherto unknown principle of evil. If necessity justifies fraud and falsehood, or any other violation of the rule of right, it may be adduced to varnish over the infernal butchery of Jaffa. Let us spit upon such Jesuitical morality. Let us firmly believe that no plea will hold valid before the tribunal for overstepping the line of rectitude; and as to the cases of imagined exception, let us hope that a benignant Providence will never expose us to the fatal necessity of sinning. If it is doomed that such an evil day shall come (the most unlikely of all events), let us *wait for it*, and not establish beforehand an ungodly casuistry. If any still urge that our doctrine, though a noble one, does not make sufficient provision against the possibility of finding ourselves, some unlucky morning, in a tight place, I reply as before, you have no more right to calculate on one of these tight places and unlucky mornings, than the girl found by her mother sobbing in an agony of distress at the thought of the baby's climbing up into the heated oven; in which case, *what should she do* to anticipate such an occurrence? "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," especially as God's providence is so arranged, that the evil day seldom comes. But *should* it come? Well, all we say is, that our Father is merciful. In the hour of extremity, when an avalanche of calamity is rushing, thundering down upon us which we can escape only by turning a corner,—in other words, by fraud, or some other tampering with the canons of eternal truth,—he will doubtless make due allowance for the infirmity of his

creature. There are moral tornadoes which carry a man *fairly off his feet*, in the midst of which law is silent, because she knows that mortal strength is unable to withstand them. But shame on those who turn exceptions into rules, and, in view of such remote probabilities, familiarize their minds with the abominable maxim of doing evil that good may come. The apostle cries more than "shame" upon them; he says, that "their damnation is just."

3. Our history illustrates the prolific nature of sin. Jacob, when he approached his father, intended to play *dummy*, and merely stand up in the disguise of Esau. But he is not let off so easily; he soon finds that he has placed himself in a situation where sin must be added to sin, lie to lie, and the whole crowned with the most shocking profanity. Thus it usually happens. The commission of one crime makes another necessary in order to supply what is lacking in the first. Thus the evil-doer finds himself by one deviation from duty drawn into more than he ever thought of. There is an old adage to this purport, that misfortunes never come alone; but it holds much more true of sins. They are a needy and numerous family. Open the heart to one of them: they will gradually introduce each other till nearly all obtain the right of citizenship. Look at that unfortunate creature with glass in hand. He thinks only of forgetting his cares and enjoying with a few comrades an hour of harmless glee. But does he look forward to the possible issue? Does he know what secrets he may betray; in what sensual abominations he may fall; what blasphemies he may belch; into what

quarrels he may be hurried, bringing the most awful consequences upon himself and others? Does he know that when, on the next morning he awakes from his orgies, he will find at his side a *dead wife* and child, perhaps, victims to the madness that had come over him, — not by one of those mysterious dispensations which excite not less our pity than our horror, because independent of human will,— but by his own voluntary agency?

Or take the murderer on the highway. First, he mingled with light and riotous company. Squandering his resources, he commenced secret encroachments on the property of others. Detected here, he *robs*, and robbery ends in blood. View him just before this dreadful consummation. Perhaps, on the morning of the day when he committed it, the idea of such a deed never entered his heart. Pecuniary embarrassment induces him to make an essay of force upon a traveller's purse. He goes out for the purpose, designing only to frighten the man a little, and return with his booty to lead a reputable life. He has hardly made up his mind to put a bullet in the pistol, but on the whole thinks it best. Oh, for a warning voice to point out the horror that awaits him, — to tell him how much deeper than he dreams, he is going to plunge into a hell of crime. Unexpected resistance exasperates his passions, takes away his self-command, blinds to consequences, and before he is aware — *click* — the deed is done. He is a murderer!

We have probably read the monkish legend of Satan's appearing to a pious hermit whom he had long tormented with his fiery darts of temptation,

and promising that if he would consent to perpetrate one single offence, which he would name, he would never trouble him more. The hermit agreed to the bargain, and option was given him of committing the sin of murder, adultery, or drunkenness. He chose the latter, considering drunkenness the most venial. But mark the issue! When that sin was upon him, he perpetrated *both the others!* This little story has a profound significance. It illustrates the progressive and self-multiplying nature of transgression. Think you that before the commission of those enormous frauds which we read of so often in the public prints, our ears tingling during the perusal, that no previous steps had been taken which, by an almost fatal necessity, determined the final catastrophe? We know the contrary. We know that the first acts of peculation were so slight, that it needed some sternness to pass a vehement censure on them. Ah! had they only stopped there, we are ready in our good nature to exclaim, and would exclaim (if reflection did not step in and break off our pretty sentence short in the middle), by reminding us that they could not stop more than Jacob in the midst of his lying. Having taken the slide they were *bound for the bottom.* Fraud must be covered over by fraud. Forgery must be protected by endless repetition, till some day their whole structure of villany explodes at once, and they are driven with execration from the society of men. So true is the proverb, "It is the first step that costs." Could we accurately trace the genealogy of events, we should often discover that the convicted felon's miserable fate has its origin, not so much in the enormity which

has been detected and excites universal detestation, as in the paltry shilling which, years before, when a simple boy, he had filched from his employer's till.

4. And this leads me to remark that the sins of youth have often a long and lasting influence. Jacob, when he wronged his father and brother, was a lad not arrived at years of maturity. His sin, too, was pardoned, and doubtless repented of with bitter tears. Yet it haunted him till his dying day. And thus many excellent men, like Peter, David, and Paul, have had their happiest hours darkened by some absorbing and harrowing reminiscence. Let the thought solemnly remind the young to avoid a false step in the early stage of life's perilous journey. The season is a peculiarly critical one. Character is now forming for time and eternity, and the elements of happiness and misery are fast collecting. You cannot commit a crime with impunity though you stand alone in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. God shall remember it. You shall remember it. Yes, it shall be written deep in the conscience, and occasion unspeakable sorrow at a future period. Oh, the agony with which that prayer of the Psalmist is often uttered by the man of gray hairs, "Lord, pardon the sins of my youth!" Be wise, then, and so fill up the hours of the morning which you now enjoy, that in the night of old age your blunted sensibilities may be revived by the sweet fragrance of the flowers of memory culled from the distant past, and, looking back with calm serenity, you may say, "I have fought a good fight."

Let us, in the last place, consider our text as an

instructive commentary on the frailties and imperfections of the truly pious. God is sometimes pleased to withdraw from them his supporting hand, and when he does, they soon let the church and the world *know it*, — giving sad evidences of their weakness, and proving that nothing made them to differ from others but sovereign grace. Let us be taught by such examples to be clothed with humility, to distrust ourselves; and, when we stand most firmly, to take heed lest we fall most grievously. You are confident, you say, that you could not be guilty of such meanness, impiety, and falsehood. But are you confident? Are you quite certain, that, if your position and circumstances were so changed as to offer strong temptation, you would hold fast your integrity? At all events, it is best to be vigilant and modest. Even were you stronger than you think yourself, your true safety is not there, but in commending yourself to God and the word of his grace.

Fretfulness.

VI.

FRETFULNESS.

Psalms 37 : 8. Fret not thyself.

PROPOSE to attack, from these words of the Psalmist, a disposition, which no one of sound mind will pretend to justify, but which few consider as positively vicious. The most of persons allow it to be an imperfection, a trait of character incapable of exciting admiration or love. But they have too much charity for infirm human nature, to bestow a harsher epithet on one of its most excusable weaknesses. We confess we are in the habit of viewing it in a different light, — as a vice fatal to happiness, dishonoring to that God who giveth us all things richly to enjoy, and forbidden by the express letter of revelation, as well as the whole spirit of true religion.

The Psalmist, indeed, employs the words of our text only in reference to a particular form of this vice, for the whole passage reads, "Fret not thyself because of the ungodly." But our observations shall relate to fretfulness in general. We shall first describe this unhappy temper; and, secondly, offer some considerations tending to guard you against its indulgence.

We are aware there are some, who, possessing very strict and delicate notions on the subject of sermonizing, will hardly allow discourses, like that which is to follow, the name of *sermons* at all. It is of very trifling consequence, however, by what name my remarks are called, provided they do any of you *good*. For my part, I have never been able to discover either sense or scripture in banishing morals from the pulpit; nor, after my best endeavors, can I frame a better definition of what is called a sermon than this, — a discourse calculated to make men wiser and better.

The temper we speak of is that which the evils of life are often found to produce, especially in persons whose sensibilities are not under the control of a sound judgment. It is a jaundice of the soul, in which its unhappy subject receives enjoyment from nothing, and extracts wretchedness from everything beneath the sun; clothing the loveliest objects of creation with a dismal, sick-chamber gloom. He is never satisfied; and, as if the cup of human suffering was not sufficiently full, goes through the world on a voyage of discovery for new ingredients to add to the bitterness and abundance of its contents.

With regard to the evils and inconveniences of life the wise man reasons thus: "Why should I allow myself to be annoyed by them, when I see that I am but a partner in that common inheritance which has descended to the human family? Let me patiently endure; let me make the best of what I cannot remedy, and obtain a full compensation by improving those innumerable sources of felicity that a benevolent Deity hath opened up to me in this wilderness. In short, let me, like the

sun-dial, count the hours that *shine*, leaving the record of nights, and dark, dismal days to those who have a taste for such observations." But not so our melancholy brother, who thinks he does well to be angry. He counts only evils, and makes little or no distinction between them: it matters not how great or small, — whether peculiar to himself, or common to man. He never asks whether they are not fairly outbalanced by his resources of enjoyment, but gives himself up to an abject melancholy, venting his bitter bile in a constant flow of murmurs and groans.

But that our illustrations may be more definite, let us view this unworthy temper in some of its most common modifications.

First, we shall invite your notice to the peevish Christian. That the ways of true religion are ways of pleasantness, is a fact confirmed by the experience of every good man. It is also true, however, that it entails trials which make considerable demand on his powers of endurance as well as active courage. It is not always the Christian enjoys the light of his Father's countenance. He is harassed by a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him in subjection to the law of sin; and often tears run down his cheeks because men keep not the commandments of his God. To these, and all other sorrows connected with his Christian profession, it is his *right*, his *duty* to feel tenderly alive. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ has nothing in common with the fantastic dogmas of stoicism. But it too often happens that sensibility is unduly excited, and religious grief degenerates into *religious*

fretfulness. Under its dark shadow he is found writing bitter things against himself without a cause. Forgetting, for example, that true religion attains its perfection in the soul by a gradual process, by growth and development, not by sudden projection, he murmurs because he does not make the rapid advancement he expected; because corruption still remains powerful, and the enemies of his peace have yielded so little ground after years of conflict. Not seldom does he give the lie to all the evidences of his salvation; or, if kept from this folly, he finds it exceedingly difficult to repel the thought that God is acting toward him with strange rigor.

There is another class of Christians whose morbid irritability fixes on those around them. They are quite content with their own spiritual attainments, but very much displeased with those of every one else. All things are going wrong. The love of many, on whom they built high hopes, is waxing cold; no blessing attends the administration of divine ordinances; church-discipline is sadly neglected; the minister does not visit, or visits too much. In short, there are griefs and grievances so numerous that it would require an age to recount them. Now, we readily grant that such things are real and substantial grounds of lamentation. But this says nothing to justify the morose temper we are describing. No Christian has a right to brood over the evils of the church as if all was lost, and Christ had gone back to his grave. Depend upon it, whenever you see one thus engaged; one always presenting the dark side of the picture, turning away his eyes from everything

that is favorable and promising, that you may put him down as a man who, under pretence of laying to heart the desolations of Zion, is feeding *his own spleen!*

The state of things in the world at large, supplies yet more abundant aliment to the religious temperament we speak of. It is a plain case that sin has caused innumerable disorders, which we are witnessing and feeling every hour. We live in an age of gold doubtless; but, also, of *iron*, when right is invaded, innocence oppressed, rapine and violence go unpunished, and the wicked "flourish as a green bay tree." Yonder is a virtuous mechanic, going to his humble cot, after a long day of exhausting toil, with a pittance scarce sufficient to procure a mouthful of bread for each of his starving offspring; before him, lolling in his splendid chariot, a wretch who never shed a tear, who has fattened on the oppression of the fatherless and the widow, who has defrauded every man who trusted either in his honor or his oath. This wretch, this worse than hyena of the desert, is perhaps at the *head of the commercial world*, and is looked up to with almost universal homage and respect. Such spectacles often occur. With respect to them, we are called to exercise the virtue of patient acquiescence, believing that, though the ways of Providence are a mystery, at present unfathomable, yet a time shall come, when his righteousness shall be vindicated to the confusion of the ungodly, and complete satisfaction of all the good. What, though there are enemies in the world of truth and righteousness, numerous as the sand of the sea,

and their cause fearfully prosperous? God reigns. We know that the issue will be glorious; that the destiny of his adversaries is as portentous as their wickedness. Let them enjoy their day! Methinks a generous enemy would be rather pleased than otherwise that the poor devils had a little rope previous to their final and eternal overthrow.

But quite a different view of the subject is taken by the man we are describing. Forgetting his entire incompetence to sit in judgment on the deep things of the incomprehensible Supreme, he goes into spasms of indignation, accuses Providence, and sometimes almost questions whether there be a God who governs the world at all. Instead of learning from present obliquities to anticipate, with serene composure, a day of making straight, the only use he makes of them is to weaken his sense of a Divine Presence in the earth, and cherish a habit of doubting and complaining which gives a sombre aspect to the whole of his religion. He has no heart or leisure to act out holy love to his God and Saviour, for he is eternally brooding over the progress of Popery. It is no time to feast on the blessed promises of the gospel, when errors of every kind, — Infidelity, Romanism, Slaveholding, Red Democracy, Despotism, German Transcendentalism, Nebraska bills, etc., etc., — are coming in like a flood, threatening to bring back primeval chaos. How take comfort, when, at the rate at which things are going on, the world must surely come to an end in less than half a century? This is the kind of Christian who impresses the children of the world with the idea that Christianity is a sour, melancholy thing.

They see him constantly hanging his head like a bulrush; when they hear him, nothing meets the ear but the moaning of a spirit fretting at itself and all around; and they conclude that he is a lineal descendant of that weeping philosopher of old, who went up and down through Greece, painting in most horrid colors the miseries of life, that he might drive his hearers to cut their throats, or swallow poison in despair.

Let us now come to the domestic circle. It is evident that in the best ordered families there must occur, from time to time, incidents of a vexatious character, which are so many calls to the exercise of patience. This, however, is not considered by a certain class of persons, who seem to take a perfect delight in registering every misconduct, quarrelling about the veriest trifles, and pouring forth the most heart-rending complaints on what merited only a smile, or, at the worst, a mild rebuke. Their servants are the most stupid and lazy in the world. So wretchedly managed is the culinary department that scarcely once a month do they sit down to a decent meal: the bread is always dough; the milk is sour, — everything, in fact, is precisely what it ought not to be; and wife, domestics, yea, even the poor, purring animal at the fireside, spite of its sleepy and harmless look, are in a black conspiracy against the unhappy man's peace. No wonder, then, that, in self-defence, he conspires against theirs!

Another form of the vice we are describing is that arising from temporal condition. It has pleased God to establish among men a great variety in outward

circumstances. Some are rich, some are poor; some are exalted, some comparatively debased. Yet, after all, we may safely affirm that the capabilities of substantial happiness are pretty nearly equal among all classes. The only difficulty lies in men's indisposition to improve their advantages — in their strange proneness to reject the enjoyment that is within their reach. The true reason of the poor man's misery is the bitterness of his own spirit, and this would make him equally miserable were he possessor of thousands. We see this exemplified every day. Take, for instance, a man of an irritable and peevish temperament, and mark him in his progress from penury to affluence. Is there the least improvement in his feelings? Is he not just as wretched on the day of retiring from the pursuit, with a large and unincumbered fortune, as when he commenced his career? Yes. He is the same complaining being he ever was; and all the showers of Providential bounty have not smoothed a single wrinkle on his brow. When in the depths of poverty, he tormented himself because he was not rich; when rich, he mourns that he is not richer; and thus always finds something in his condition to justify the complaint of being one of the most miserable of men; and so he is, and so he richly deserves to be,—for no man can seek after hidden treasure more earnestly than he seeks after ways and means to make himself uncomfortable.

The next form of the vice under consideration is to be dealt with much more tenderly,— the fretfulness of infirmity and old age. Such is the intimate connection

between soul and body, that disorder in the one disturbs the health and serenity of the other. This is especially the case with those whose minds are naturally weak and susceptible, and who, while blessed with health, provided no resources of enjoyment independent of things merely outward. Chastened with pain on their bed, their life abhorreth bread, and their souls dainty meat. Everything sickens and disquiets. It is seldom they meet with friends so ardently affectionate as to make necessary allowance for the frequent exacerbations of temper they are doomed to witness. This adds to the bitterness of the peevish sick man's spirit — and not rarely he goes out of the world, cursing the day on which he was born, and his connections blessing the day on which he died.

There is another species of the vice under our notice, with the mention of which we shall conclude this part of our discourse. Hitherto we have supposed that the evils complained of are for the most part *real*, though not deserving the importance that is attached to them. There is a peevishness, however, which delights in ills that have no existence but *in the mind;* and this kind naturally grows out of the former. When a man has long habitually indulged a captious spirit, his imagination becomes entirely disordered. It creates false images, false inferences, false fears. He never feels at ease except when croaking. His happiness consists in being thoroughly unhappy; and hence, even when his circumstances are perfectly comfortable, he sets his wits a-working in search of some dead fly or another to spoil his cup

of enjoyment. Mark yonder female, apparently in the lowest depths of despondency. Passing yesterday through the street, she met a favorite acquaintance who neglected to return her salutation, — probably not seeing her: yet she is miserable. Mark another character. He is the possessor of ten thousand pounds; yet, he always anticipates dying in the almshouse. Observe that, though he is remarkable for a sound, vigorous constitution, and decidedly proves it three times a day, — that is, at every meal, — yet he continually dreams that he is sick; and with more safety may you insinuate that he is a thief or a defaulter, than that he is a person in good health. A hundred such instances might be adduced to show how strangely some persons contrive to put themselves out of humor with life and enjoyment.

From all that has been said, it appears that the vice described is one of no common magnitude. We hope, therefore, you will continue to favor us with your attention, while we suggest how we can most successfully guard ourselves against it, and attain a happy serenity of mind under all circumstances.

The great remedy we offer, at present, is serious reflection on the unreasonableness, the misery, and the odiousness of the temper delineated. Thoughtlessness is the parent of this as of all other evil habits. Men do not exercise timely consideration, but permit it to make gradual and imperceptible advances, till it obtains complete mastery over the soul. Were they only to think in season, they would

stand in no need of exhortations to detest and avoid it.

Consider, in the first place, its unreasonableness. Is it not most unwise to let ourselves be disturbed by every trivial disappointment and cross, like very children, when by the exercise of a little patience we should find they are utterly incapable of harming us? Add to this the reflection already made, that disappointments of some kind *must* come. We cannot expect to make the voyage of life without encountering head winds and adverse currents. On such contingencies we have as much reason to calculate, as the mariner when he trusts himself to the deceitful ocean. He knows what he must expect,—he makes his arrangements: accordingly, when the unpropitious gale is seen ruffling the deep at a distance, he takes it as a thing of course, awaits the issue with philosophic tranquillity,—his only care being so to dispose his canvas as to make the best of it; and he actually succeeds in compelling its aid while proceeding to his destined port. If overtaken by a calm, he quietly casts his anchor, and sits down to the luxury of a pipe. He would be ashamed of giving way to fretful despondency, because of an occasional cloud or squall. Equally absurd is the conduct of him, who, because everything in life does not occur precisely as he wishes, suffers himself to be deprived of his greatest treasure,—his quiet and peace of mind.

But the unreasonableness of this spirit will appear in another point of view. Its possessor takes the method best calculated to give reality and weight to his trials. By constantly brooding over them, he

gives them an importance to which they have no claim, and makes himself the abject slave of what, by one manly effort, he would have learned to despise. Which, think you, contrives to enjoy the greatest amount of happiness on a journey; the traveller, who, laying his account to suffer a variety of little hardships, good-humoredly puts up with exorbitant charges, laughs at the insolence of drivers, the craziness of his vehicle, and the badness of the roads, — who, in fine, is *determined* to be happy in spite of circumstances; or his choleric companion, who, the moment he has taken his seat, declares open war with heaven and earth, and seems to pride himself on a wonderful perspicacity in finding everywhere something on which to bestow a groan, if not a profane curse. This is a fair illustration of Jonah angry at the loss of his gourd. He adopts the very course, which, a moment's thought would teach him, is the most effectual to multiply and envenom his miseries.

Consider, in the next place, the *odiousness* of this spirit. We are so constituted that we cannot but feel unhappy at the sight of unhappiness; and this, if accompanied with a belief that the unhappiness which affects us is entirely unreasonable, creates a sort of anger at him who has obliged us to be miserable by sympathy, when there is no adequate cause. Now, the peevish, discontented man is precisely this disagreeable character. Misery on his countenance, misery on his tongue, we cannot resist the contagion; yet, fully convinced of its unreasonableness, we are provoked at his disregard for our tranquillity, and at the egotism which would cause us needless pain.

This is a consideration well worth the attention of those who feel a propensity to the vice referred to. They would do well to consider, that if they wish to receive our genuine sympathy, they must take care not to make on it unjust or exorbitant demands, lest they excite emotions of a very different nature. They would do well to consider, that, by continually dinning their neighbors' ears with lamentations, they will in time come to be viewed as no better than *swindlers;* not, indeed, cheating them out of their purse, but doing what is almost equally odious, making unauthorized and fraudulent drafts on their stock of feeling and sentiment.

I would beg leave particularly to impress this thought on the aged, and those who labor under lingering chronical disease, inasmuch as they are most liable to lose sight of it. They feel that their evils are *not imaginary*, and easily persuade themselves that they have a right to draw on their neighbors' bank of sympathy to any amount. But, then, they should reflect that their infirmities, being peculiar to themselves, are not fully understood by persons enjoying youth and health, and therefore, as to the present question, are little better than imaginary; for which reason they will find it much for their interest, in no case to demand *all* that they feel authorized to expect. If they desire to pass the evening of their days in a circle of affectionate and devoted relatives, let them stifle as often as possible the rising sigh. Let the smile of tranquillity beam on their countenances, and their sportful grandchildren hang on their lips for the good-natured jest, or instructive

story, at the very moment anguish is rioting on the heart. In fine, let them beware of that whining, querulous disposition, which makes old age, indeed, a curse, — a curse to itself, and a curse to all around it.

What a delightful spectacle is that of a sprightly, pleasant, chirping old man; especially when we perceive his happy temperament to be, not the empty, noisy mirth of the fool, but the calm blessedness of one who has built on the Rock of Ages an immortal hope. We cannot help loving him and courting his society. We see him in a situation, above all others, calculated to overspread the mind with gloom, and yet, *endeavoring to be happy*. Our pleasure is the greater, because we infer that he seeks our happiness. We know that he must suffer many things of which we have no conceptions; and yet, from regard to us, he casts over them the mantle of a constant smile. And when, at last, he sinks beneath his load; when he can no longer conceal what he would fain conceal, that he is a sufferer, how is he rewarded by the tears and tender offices of those, to whose happiness he sacrificed the only earthly gratification in which it was possible for him to indulge, that of asking our sympathy in his sorrows! In this respect, he emphatically verifies the converse of the proposition, "Ask, and ye shall receive." He *asked not;* but receives the *more*.

There is another class of reflections to which we invite the notice of those who, fond of overlooking the solid and numerous blessings enjoyed by themselves and others, brood with melancholy exaggera-

tion on the evils of our earthly pilgrimage. The temper they indulge is not only odious, but is founded on a false estimate of the present state of things, in which there is a decided *preponderance of pleasure and enjoyment.* It is too fashionable to suppose that our holy religion forbids us to take this view of the subject; that we even do it honor by finding, on everything here below, the brand of the curse, — as if religion commanded us to deny the gracious providence of God, to blaspheme the divine beauty of life. That sin has wrought awful ravages in our beautiful world is a solemn truth. But this is no reason for aggravating them and putting them forward on the canvas, leaving at the same time all its light and happiness in the background. It is a beautiful world *still.* Deny it, and you deny the benevolence of the Deity; nay, you are ready for a plunge into the dreary gulf of atheism. Look at facts. We hear sometimes of the agonies of famine and thirst; but for every victim to these horrid furies, how many happy faces see we, the signs of as happy hearts, — hearts filled with joy and gladness. Let any man in ordinary health endeavor to compute the pleasurable feelings he has experienced in a single day, — those of warmth, and of eating and drinking and talking, and looking up at the glories of God's heavens, and round him at the glories of God's earth; not to speak of the pure joys of our religion, with the various other that fill up every instant of existence, — he will find that he may as well undertake to count the sands of the seashore, or the stars of a winter sky. Sometimes the dagger pierces, the fire burns, and

poison tears the vitals. But we must travel to enjoy such sights. Our every-day scenes are of quite a different character. We witness occasionally the ravages of disease. Perhaps you visited a friend, or neighbor to-day, suffering the torments of the stone; or you were condemned to hear the suppressed groans of a poor wretch swollen with dropsy.

> "There the tertian shakes his chilling wings,
> The sleepless gout here counts the crowing cocks."

All true. But have you forgotten that for every such picture of woe you can find a thousand of sprightliness and ruddy health? Go through the country, my dear brother croaker, whose tears are continually falling over human wretchedness, — to whom "this goodly frame, the earth, seems a sterile promontory; yon brave overhanging firmament a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors, whom man delights not, nor woman either," and the ways of God still less; and count all the beds of sickness, and then count all the beds of sweet and quiet repose. Chalk all the houses visited by sorrow, and then number, if you can, the palaces, cottages, workshops, and shanties, which the sweet angel of content is cheering and blessing with her smiles.

Even in the case of the really afflicted, we shall often discover, if we look for it, far *more happiness than misery*. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." Seldom do we find a cup of sorrow, in which, mingled with the wormwood and the gall, are not exquisite aromatics, that almost neutralize its bitterness. In the darkest night there are stars that look down

with their meek, pleasant eyes, on the lonely sufferer. In every situation there are comforts and compensations, not the less real or efficacious because they escape the notice of the superficial observer. How dreadful the condition of yonder blind beggar, we exclaim, deprived of the sweet light of day and condemned to an eternal dungeon! We imagine that all within must be as black and desolate as the night without a morn, in which he is enveloped: —

> "Seasons return, but not to him returns
> Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
> But cloud instead, and ever during dark
> Surrounds him."

But we are quite mistaken in our conjectures. That poor wretch, as we think him, and of whom we have been quoting, is quite at home in his midnight, — perhaps the gayest of the gay. At least, if not merry, he is happy. He breathes the air of heaven; he listens to the music of the grove; his crust has a relish which the epicure might envy; the delightful luxury of rest after fatigue is his; if he does not see his children, he can dandle them on his knee, and, perhaps, he loves and caresses his old wife more fondly than if she was an object of his vision. Yes; even the blind beggar, for one pain, has a thousand pleasures, and as he falters along after his faithful dog, at once his companion and his guide, can look up to Heaven and thank it for existence. In short, let us ever keep in view the blessed truth that Divine Goodness rules and overrules all events. How can a

man, who firmly believes that a benevolent Deity is in everything, fret at anything? Trust in God with an implicit confidence, believing that all things are under his gracious care, — that he loves his creatures; and you will soon learn in whatsoever condition you are, therein to be content.

But do we not live in a dying world, replies our melancholy friend, and is not this enough to justify our complaints? How soon must all our pleasures cease, and the grave swallow up both us and the remembrance of us! I grant the fact. "We must all die," as the wise woman of Tekoah said; who was not so judicious, however, in her following remark, — "and are as water spilled on the ground." This, we Christians, brought up at the feet of the great Teacher of immortality, know to be false. Spilt water, indeed! No, no, wise woman. Thy sagacity is entirely at fault. Death is but the porch to life, the entrance to a state of blessedness without end, the command of the great proprietor of all "to come up higher." Why deplore the necessity of such an event when preparation is fully in our power?

Dying, besides, is essential to the existence and happiness of the race. It has pleased our good Creator to place us on a ball of earth, parts of which consist of water, rock, and sand, and all of which doubtless have excellent uses, but are not adapted to the support of human life. It has also pleased him that our race exist in succession, with the evident purpose of multiplying indefinitely the objects of his goodness, who must have remained few in number, had the same generation enjoyed a fee-simple, or perpetual

lease. And thus our little planet has for six thousand years been teeming with life and happiness, sending forth from her fruitful womb millions and millions of millions, — every individual of whom has tasted the blessedness of existence, and filled up its niche in the great gallery of the universe, — without any serious crowding or being crowded. Forty years ago our fathers occupied the beautiful domain. They are gone, and we are in possession. In a short time our children will need it, and, God bless them, let them have it, — woods, tenements, waters, mines, metals, fisheries, hereditaments, — all! It is our part to give a smiling welcome to the quit notice, and retire gracefully from the scene. The diseases and afflictions which precede it are not curses, but kind provisions of nature for reconciling us to the change. Were we universally torn away in the flush of health and vigor, there might be reason to complain. But the general rule is far otherwise. Usually we are made to feel that this is not the place of our rest, by pains more or less acute, and the growing infirmities of age; so that at last the well-disciplined mind takes to death as naturally as the tired infant to sleep on its mother's bosom.

"I would not live alway, I ask not to stay."

How gently, too, and by what insensible degrees, are the generations of men removed from their places in the world! With the exception of now and then a pestilence or exterminating war, the work goes on so quietly that we scarcely heed it, unless we take a large compass of years in our survey. How seldom

is more than one of a family taken at a time, and at what distant intervals! The real wonder is, how, in thirty or forty years, so many of us contrive to slip away from the company without creating any serious blank in it!

Nor let us forget the admirable arrangement by which the loss of friends soon ceases to be felt, leaving only a tender remembrance that partakes as much of pleasure as pain. How soon does time exert its soothing power, enabling us to look back with surprise to the agony experienced in parting! The thought may not be a very sentimental one, nor figure in a sonnet, but is undoubtedly true, and a proof of the benignant wisdom of Providence, that the hiatus in our associations and feelings, occasioned by the loss of friends, is tolerably well filled up at the end of the first year. At the end of the second, were the power given us of resuscitating them, we would pause and calculate *pros* and *cons*, before exerting it. At the end of the third, their return might be extremely inconvenient. Ah! think not, my brother, who art mourning over the remains of the beloved partner of thy cares and joys, that all is lost, and that peace will never revisit thy widowed bosom! The dark night of sorrow may be succeeded before you are aware by the dawn of a happy morning. Consolation, rich consolation, and in the most agreeable form, may be in store for you. Peradventure, before the grass carpets the grave of her whose irreparable loss you mourn, *another* of heaven's last best gifts to man may grace your desolate bower and Eden bloom again! Happy for man-

kind, that hearts are of more malleable stuff than many imagine. They may be bruised, and bleed at the stroke of misfortune, but are seldom known to break, except in the pages of some lady novelist.

Finally; the great argument, by which we would urge you to correct the vice under discussion, is its incongruity with our sinful character and condition. Whatever our external circumstances be, it is certain that they are far better than we deserve. We have no right to be angry; for it is of the tender mercies of God that we have not been long ere this consumed. Let us think of this, when we feel a disposition to repine at the ways of Heaven, and charge Providence with unkindness. It will be an admirable sweetener of an acrid temper. Consider, unreasonable man, who permittest thyself to be wretched at the loss of a few dollars, or some trifling disappointment, that, if thou hadst thy due, thou wouldst be in hell, weeping and gnashing thy teeth. Let imagination carry thee, for a moment, to the regions of the lost, and while listening to the groans of an agony which shall never have an end, learn the blessedness of thy condition, and the debt of gratitude thou art under to that merciful Being who has thus made thee to differ.

Causes and Cure of Low Spirits.

VII.

CAUSES AND CURE OF LOW SPIRITS.

Psalms 77 : 2–13. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord, etc.

HAT a terrible state of mind is this described by the Psalmist, and how graphically set before us! We almost *see* the unhappy man writhing and tossing on his bed of agony, and hear the doleful laments which he pours out with a bitter intensity enough to melt a heart of stone. "In the day of my trouble," he says, "I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not." But meditations on God only aggravated the malady. "I thought on God and was troubled." Billows of distress were all around, and deluged his very soul. "I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed."

This sad mental condition was not peculiar to David. The disease is not an uncommon one, and exists often when it is least suspected. You will allow me, therefore, to make some remarks which may be of advantage to those in whose hands God has put, for wise reasons, no doubt, this cup of trembling. With regard to its nature and symptoms. It consists in a settled depression of mind, proceeding from a gloomy apprehension of divine

wrath; a prevailing doubt, or rather disbelief of our pardon and acceptance, producing debility of spirit, dark views of Divine Providence, melancholy forebodings of the future, and an awful sinking of heart when eternity or any kindred subject happens to be mentioned.

I have specified *debility of spirit* as one of its effects; and nothing is more true. There is invariably conjoined with it a torpor bordering on paralysis of all the moral activities. A man without hope is like a ship becalmed and floundering in the trough of the sea. He has no *motive* power, nor buoyancy, no impulse to exertion, nor any principle of courage to sustain him in the pursuit of objects beneficial to himself or others. Constantly brooding over his miseries, he looks around him with a vacant eye, utterly unappreciative of the claims made upon him by the law of duty,—a law in which he finds no advantage or reward. He loses his faith in God, in human nature, and in all things. Even the great universe is, in his eyes, a *great sham*, a juggler's exhibition, plausible enough to the outside gazer, but, to him who has been admitted behind the curtain, a compound of pasteboard, red ochre, and rancid oil. That the sincerely religious man is preserved from such a desolating scepticism we may admit, and do assuredly believe. But he is often discovered not far from its dark confines. Excessive grief is the most demoralizing, as well as the meanest of all feelings to which the mind can surrender itself, and the Christian finds this to his cost, as well as others, if he permits it to get the upper hand. *It is despair which makes*

devils. If, when first cast out from the celestial city, they had been permitted to carry with them one bud of hope plucked from the trees of Paradise, that bud, we can scarce avoid believing, would have ripened into the flower, Salvation; and long before this they would have found their way back to God's loving bosom and their lost heaven.

We now proceed to consider, first, the causes; and, second, the cure of this unhappy disease.

With regard to the first, it is undoubtedly sometimes occasioned by distemper of body. Thus, perhaps, with the Psalmist. He speaks, in the second verse, of his sore running in the night, which may, indeed, be considered as figurative language, but more naturally points to some corporeal trouble,— an ulcer, carbuncle, or leprosy,— the torture of which deprived him of rest, and so affected his nervous system that life was a burden. Religious feelings, like others, ebb and flow with the animal spirits, and such is the connection between mind and matter that they exercise over each other a most powerful influence. Persons, for example, of infirm and sickly constitutions are always ready to view things on the most gloomy side, and the least circumstance may occasion a dejection which they cannot throw off; and this begins very soon to tell on their religion. They are too apt to fix their thoughts, if capable of thought at all, on the more profound and awful parts of divine revelation; such as the origin of moral evil, predestination, the unpardonable sin, and to perplex themselves with embarrassing questions that would make an archangel low-spirited.

Close confinement, also, will often produce this moral condition. So, likewise, will excess of care and secular engagements, wearing away and exhausting the strength. It is also sometimes hereditary and the effect of a natural temperament or idiosyncrasy descending from parent to child, as it is found to prevail in certain families. I mention this class of influences first, because, if the spring of dejection lies here, the whole matter is accounted for at once, and the aid of *medicine* must be invoked. There is no irreverence in saying that the brain, the bile, and the bowels, have much to do with spiritual exercises, and moderate doses of blue pill and sulphate of quinine, with plenty of exercise in the open air, are sometimes to be ranked among the most efficacious means of grace.

Take the case of the unhappy Cowper, that man of genius, baptized in the Holy Ghost, to whose writings the Christian community is so greatly indebted. A stranger to his history would hardly be brought to believe that, at the very time of writing that most humorous of productions, "John Gilpin," in which the very spirit of fun and merriment seems embodied, the author was in a state of hopeless misery almost without a parallel. During much of his life he was the slave of a mental depression bordering on madness. The heavens above were starless; the earth beneath was, to him, ever reeling and rocking over a fiery abyss. In a word, he had persuaded himself that he was a God-abandoned reprobate, and actually died in the horror of such a thought. Yet nothing is clearer to an attentive

reader of his biography than that the cause of his misery lay in a morbid organism, and might have been removed by seasonable appliances to the seat of the disease. Happy would it have been for the poor valetudinarian, had he been rescued from the monotony of a sedentary life, from his easy-chair, his pious widows, pet-rabbits, and indiscreet, though well-meaning clergyman, who discoursed high theology to him when he should have been sweating at the plough-tail, or ranging through highways and byways on a blooded English hunter; even though, like that of the renowned hero of his ballad, it should sometimes carry him farther than he intended: had he, in a word, been thrown into the excitements and stir of an active, engrossing occupation. Let us not charge on religion what is the effect of causes purely physical, and which (the causes remaining) no piety can cure. It is an abuse of language to call a greasy stomach or a torpid liver by the sounding name of spiritual desertion.

Superstition is, at times, an occasion of religious depression, in those pious persons who have enjoyed scant opportunities of enlightenment. There is nothing so trifling which the superstitious and over-scrupulous mind may not magnify into an affair of vital importance; for example, the appearance of a comet, the ticking of an insect in rotten wood, or some peculiarity in the flame of a candle. In this case, the conscience is not in a healthy state, but contracts a morbid irritability, under the influence of which its subject can say nothing and do nothing without feeling an unnatural alarm, — an alarm for

which no reasonable account can be given. Reliance on dreams, sudden impressions, or what is called presentiments, illusive voices, imaginary warnings of the death of distant friends, and other revelations from the spiritual world, cannot fail to produce such a distemperature of spirit as takes away all its manly vigor. Wild and horrible imaginings, fostered by a sort of preaching not yet entirely exploded, and even by ecclesiastical anathemas concerning the nature of future punishment, as if it consisted in literal burning and other instrumentalities of physical torture,— one of the stupidest conceits that ever entered the imagination, to craze it, and not having a shadow of foundation in the word of God, — tend in the same direction. Likewise, false notions of the sin against the Holy Ghost; a sin, which, if ever committed since the Spirit withdrew from the church his sensible manifestations, requires such a rare concurrence of circumstances that its commission now is simply possible. In fact, we may trace a large proportion of all the instances of this mental malady to some form of ignorance and superstition.

There is a mode, for instance, of contemplating the doctrine of a special providence which proves a source of much self-torment. Instead of resting satisfied with the general fact, so rational and delightful, that the great Father, who orders all things according to the counsel of his will, regards with a special interest the welfare of his people, many Christians carry the matter so far, that every incident that befalls them and theirs, the most trivial occurrence in domestic life, is interpreted to be a voice,

directly from the throne, either of commendation, or reproof; and therefore, a sort of *thermometrical gauge*, by which they are enabled to make a shrewd guess at their spiritual condition. Ever craving after sensible proofs of their adoption, they look away from those placed within their reach, to tests which will certainly mislead. They want a sign from heaven, and that sign they find in the treatment they receive from Providence in its daily workings. These they note with painful minuteness, and perhaps record in a private journal; forgetting that God has quite other purposes to answer in his providential dealings, than informing sister Hepzibah, or brother Smith, how they stand in his estimation on a particular morning. From this, arise painful misgivings; fears that he has withdrawn his tender mercy; for why — they ask, and on their theory with perfect justice — does he visit them with so many tokens of his displeasure, and count them as enemies? Thus, the excellent Boston, author of the "Fourfold State," whose autobiography is full of such reminiscences, was plunged into a black melancholy, that lasted for weeks, by the simple circumstance, that one day, stepping from the door-sill, he stumbled, and sprained his ankle. The good man refused to be comforted, and perhaps another stumble would have so settled the question of his Christian hope that he would have gone mourning all his days. Meanwhile, the *true* lesson of this providence he seems to have entirely overlooked, at least makes no mention of it, namely, the necessity of an elderly man's taking better heed to his steppings. Nothing is more easy than in this

way poisoning the sources of happiness; and, usually, God suffers the error to punish itself by the baneful consequences that follow.

We may notice, as a cause of depression, the application of some other false tests in estimating Christian character. Every one, familiar with religious experience, knows that it exhibits itself very differently in different individuals, according to their peculiar temperaments. While the same spiritual life vivifies the whole body of Christ, there is a beautiful variety in its forms of manifestation. There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit, — differences of administration, but the same Lord. With some, the *devotional* type is predominant. They love to soar on the wings of holy contemplation, and get away, where they can join the songs of the glorified round the great white throne. Others find their chief enjoyment in the sphere of practical life. With them is predominant a sense of *obligation*, — of *duty*. They know very little of the ecstasies and raptures which some speak of; but they are efficient *workers*, and must be principally depended on for the diffusion of truth and holiness throughout the world. Some, like Paul, expatiate *con amore* in the field of *doctrinal investigation*. Others, like loving John, are always found in their Master's bosom. Others, with the high-souled James, are looking with steady gaze at the perfect law of liberty.

There are honest Thomases, also, of an inquiring turn, always hungering and thirsting for evidence; finding difficulty in bringing up their faith completely to the approved standard regarding certain articles,

considered by some nearly fundamental. Others have a faculty of belief that can swallow mountains. There are men who can believe propositions astounding enough to startle inanity itself, though they, on the other hand, are equally unfortunate, who have no receptivity whatever, — like a friend of the speaker, who confessed that he never could finally persuade himself of the existence of the city of London, until he found himself in the middle of it, looking up at the cupola of St. Paul's. Some, to proceed with our remarks, are fond of the public element of religion, — neglect no occasions of being present in the house of God on the Sabbath, and are seldom absent from the more informal reunions during the week. Others delight to walk along by the silent shore of private meditation. There is, also, a class — which noisy bigots hardly recognize as belonging to the sacramental host at all — whose love to God, perfectly sincere, but not demonstrative, takes the form of philanthropy. There is still another class, of a temperament so joyous, that religion with them is a perpetual festival; they seem ready to break out in a song or a dance. Opposed to them are those whose piety is of so gloomy a type that they seem just escaped from the cell of a monastery. These varieties are in perfect accordance with each other. None could well be spared. All are essential, like the different strings of a perfect musical instrument, to the grand diapason, or general symphony.

But, yet, the fact stated is often a source of moral anxiety to the Christian. He is conscious of a dole-

ful coming short in many excellent gifts which others possess. He has not their measure of devotional feeling, comparatively little experience of what is called communion with God. Even the spirit of prayer is not that in which he sees many fellow Christians rejoice. Meanwhile, he has ample compensation if he only knew it; more humility, more calm and settled dependence, greater firmness and persistency, and a stronger sense of practical obligation. The process of sanctification is going on, if less ostentatiously, with far more depth; though he makes no noise in the street, nor lets loose a glib tongue in every prayer-meeting. Dazzled, however, with the more brilliant demonstrations around, he writes the most cruelly bitter things against himself, and is almost willing to believe that he is an entire stranger to the grace of God; while, in *sterling attainment*, he may occupy a position so immeasurably superior as to be out of sight.

Another source of trouble, and a very common one, is a serious misapprehension of the gospel doctrine of forgiveness. That doctrine is embraced in the simple formula, level to the comprehension of a child: "*The grace of God freely remits sin through Christ.*" When the penitent is led to credit this, and rest upon it with childlike reliance, not taking away from its rich pregnancy of meaning, nor corrupting its purity by the addition of any foreign element, his alarm subsides; for peace of conscience naturally and necessarily follows a believing apprehension of the blood of atonement. But, if he errs here, — if, misunderstanding the plan of the gospel, he continues

to trust partly in himself, and endeavors to establish a *quasi* righteousness of his own, not submitting absolutely and without mental reservation to the righteousness of God, — his distress is sure to increase; and, if other things concur, to plunge him into a settled gloom. Though truly penitent, he does not believe that he is. Though invited freely to the cross, he excludes himself from its benefits, for he conceives that he is at present too great a sinner to venture on approaching; he must make himself *better* before he comes. In the mean time, cleaving to the law which only condemns, he labors, watches, prays, with the intensest earnestness, but no kind of success. His laborious experiments of self-improvement always turn out disastrously, and his life is spent in a wearisome drudgery of outward duties and self-inflictions, which, instead of meliorating his condition, leave him worse and more miserable than before, — like the poor shirt-woman in the song, condemned eternally to her "sew, sew, sew," as the sole means of eking out a wretched existence, until even this resource fails her, and in utter hopelessness she lays herself down and dies. Many of the truly pious realize something of this in their religious experience. They do not, of course, die the death eternal; but, they are chastised till the last moment, for the dishonor they have done to their Saviour's grace. They go to heaven, but in a *cloud*, — not in chariots of fire amid the jubilee of exulting angels and the spirits of the just.

Another frequent cause of low spirits, not sufficiently considered, is some wilful sin secretly cher-

ished in the heart and often practised in the life. I do not allude to sins of ignorance or infirmity, nor to the effects of sudden temptation, when the enemy comes in like a flood, nor to the imperfections which are inseparable from our purest thoughts and actions. These ought not to occasion religious depression; for they are incident to our frail humanity. But if some course of habitual, overt acts of criminality, whether open or secret, be entered on, some palpable inconsistency admitted, some lie taken to the bosom, something that lays waste the conscience or grieves the Holy Spirit, the consequence frequently is, and ought to be, a complete shutting off by that divine agent of his comforting influences. Ephraim is wedded to an idol, and the Lord will not contest the matter, but says, "Let him alone." The unhappy Christian, now fairly started on a course of retrograde movement, has, it is likely, many checks of conscience and warnings of mercy. Probably some event of a rousing nature occurs. Some awakening sermon, or book, or a casual conversation, startles him out of his lethargy. He repents, and endeavors to return to God. Perhaps he does return, at least there is the appearance of it, and he seems to walk for a time in deep contrition and exemplary watchfulness. But the reptile is scotched, not killed outright. His old proclivities, after a while, like a wound healed only on the surface, break out afresh. These declensions and revivings, these sinnings and repentings, recur again and again, like the periodical intermissions of an ague. But by each relapse his state of mind becomes more thoroughly miserable. He maintains, perhaps,

fair appearances before his friends, — mighty in a prayer-meeting, a Boanerges in the pulpit, — but a worm secretly gnaws his vitals, and a hidden fire drinks up his spirit.

In addition to these causes of inward grief, long-continued affliction must likewise be mentioned. It is very common to talk flippantly on this subject. Few things are more easy than to bear with Christian patience and magnanimity the trials of others. We are full of matter, as Elihu says; our belly is ready to burst as new bottles when we recommend submission to a suffering friend; but to feel the scourge on our own backs is a very different matter. If the calamity be not of that overwhelming character, which, like the tornado, strikes down everything before it, blanching the hair and breaking the heart at once, it may be sustained. But if otherwise, — if sorrows come, as the poet says, "not as single spies, but in battalions;" if they touch us precisely in the most vulnerable part, or if they be continued and complicated, stroke following stroke, snapping in rapid succession all the ties which bind us to life, — we may claim a lofty heroism which even patient Job had not, if we find that our spirits begin not to fail. A little of the wholesome discipline of trial, like a little persecution, braces up the soul. A man with head erect, can *walk right into it;* but it is very different when deep calls unto deep, at the noise of God's waterspouts, and all his billows go over us.

I mention, lastly, the hiding of God's countenance. This is not an imaginary trouble, nor, as the strangers to living piety are fond of supposing, a form and out-

growth of fanaticism. There is a mysterious communion with the Author of blessedness, when God and the soul seem to touch, which it is the privilege and high happiness of the renewed mind to experience, though unable to define it in such a way as to satisfy a mere earthly logic, or impart a knowledge of it to other minds; and when it is intercepted, nothing can be more forlorn and dreary than the state of eclipse which follows. Under other inflictions it may be conceived possible to bear up. But, when God withdraws the light of his countenance from a spirit susceptible of and habituated to its enjoyment, the loss is intolerable. Our Lord, in the hour of his unparalleled suffering, did not complain till he came to this part of his cup. But then he *did* complain. He could not bear it, but gives vent to his bursting anguish in that memorable exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Enough has probably been said on the causes of disease in question. We proceed,

Secondly, to treat of its cure. Now, there are three very different methods of bringing about this desirable issue. The one is adopted by the man of the world when he falls in with a case which he wishes to relieve. The second is that of the injudicious though well-meaning Christian friend; who, in applying it, often does more harm than good, — his prescription being as apt to kill as to cure. The third is that which we recommend, and which we shall speak of after briefly noticing the others.

The man of the world has a sincere compassion for one laboring under religious dejection, but, not

understanding the pathology of the case, cannot direct him to the proper remedy. He simplifies the matter exceedingly. Like the medical theorist who admits of but one disease in the human system, or the musician who plays on a single string, he provides a single cause for all the forms of the evil. With him it is *vapor*, a morbid state of the imagination, which he calls the blues, and he proposes diversion, pleasure, dissipation, as a universal antidote. When these methods are employed without discrimination, as they too often are, the effect may be easily conjectured. Undoubtedly, they may remove lowness of spirits for a time; but it is often by generating a still *more dangerous* disease, disregard of God and insensibility of conscience, which, if they continue, must issue in the absolute ruin of the soul. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, this shall ye have of mine hand, saith the Lord; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

The second mode is adopted by the injudicious Christian friend (like the author of a tract on Assurance, that has been making some noise in our churches). In one respect there is a strong likeness between this kind of adviser and the man of the world. He, too, is apt to play on one string. Without weighing different circumstances, he proposes the same remedy in every instance. He would *comfort* at all events, and through all impediments. Instead of examining the several causes of grief, for the purpose of making appropriate applications, he at once holds forth such an exhibition of the gospel as encourages sin; separating its consolations from that

holy diligence in renouncing evil habits which is essential to the attainment of true comfort. This is to administer an opiate, which composes, indeed, but by stupefying. This is to "heal the hurt of the daughter of my people" slightly, saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."

The considerate and wise adviser, when called in, proceeds by another method. He will not speak comfort except on solid grounds. He endeavors to discern the things that differ, and thus "show himself approved of God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." For example: If there is ground for believing that the sufferer labors under *bodily maladies*, he will recommend, in the first instance, *bodily remedies*, — in a word, due attention to health. If his spirits are broken by excessive study, or constant fagging at a sedentary occupation, he will advise him to unbend the bow, to take a voyage, keep a horse, cultivate a little farm, or join a cricket club. He will teach him to distinguish between the natural consequences of bodily disease, and the effects of the displeasure of God; so that he will see the utter folly of attempting to cure the low spirits induced by the former in any other way than obedience to the laws which govern the animal machine, —laws which he can no more alter by prayers and texts of Scripture, than he can alter the precession of the equinoxes, or the passage of the sun through the zodiac. In short, religious counsellors should think of the wise and sagacious Isaiah, who, called in to prescribe for the terrible dejection of good king Hezekiah, preached

no sermon, but applied a poultice for a plaster: "Let them take a lump of figs and lay it on the boil, and he will recover." If he perceives him harassed by superstitious fears, he will exhort him to study the Bible with the aid of a rational commentator, or dip into some popular book of natural science. He will endeavor to enlarge his mind in short; to show him that sheer ignorance caused his panic terrors, and to make him ashamed of that ignorance. I once knew a young person, who had scarce entered her teens, kept in such constant fright by the ticking of what seemed a watch at the head of her bed, portending, as she thought, a speedy death, that she lost her health and appetite, and gave every indication of falling into a decline. After long concealing the dreadful secret, she one day confessed it to her father, who smilingly took down from the shelf a book of natural history, and pointed out the insect that produced the noise, explaining at the same time how it was done. The effect was instantaneous. The child recovered her health and spirits almost in a moment, bounded up in an ecstasy, clapped her hands and exclaimed, "O dear father, what a world of misery I have endured, that would soon have put me in my cold, dark grave; and all because I did not understand the drumming of a dear little bug that was kindly entertaining me with its music!" In the distress springing from a misapprehension of the plan of the gospel, the wise counsellor will expatiate on the free, pardoning love of God. He will tell the desponding penitent that God delighteth in mercy, that he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but

would rather that he should turn to him and live. When the Father sees the returning prodigal afar off, he runs forward, falls on his neck and kisses him. God is love.

Another topic, in this case, will be the all-sufficiency of the death and intercession of the Saviour. What can exceed the merits of our incarnate Lord? What surpass the virtue of his sacrifice? Did he not die the just for the unjust? Is not his death a propitiation for the sins of the whole world? Was not the law fulfilled, the moral government of God honored, justice appeased, and the demands of holiness answered? Is not Christ now in heaven as our intercessor, and is he not able to save to the uttermost? Shall a man presume to say that his sins are too great to be expiated by such a mighty undertaker, who, even in the days of his weakness raised the dead, and, by the speaking of a word, hushed the furious tempest into a sabbath calm?

The free and unlimited offer of the gospel is likewise an appropriate means of relief. "Whosoever will, let him come." Jesus stood and cried: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink, and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Let the child of sorrow listen to these accents of mercy till his soul drinks in their fulness of blessed meaning. Let him acknowledge the misery and disappointment which have attended his most strenuous efforts to become really holy on the plan of self-reliance he has at present adopted. What a poor, weak, and depraved being is he! For such a crea-

ture, so fallen, and alienated from the life of God, to purchase heaven, or to change his own heart, or even contribute to it by any direct efficiency, is impossible. As well may a paralytic be told to rise up and walk. He can do nothing free from sin, even though deliverance from eternal death were the reward of that single deed. Let him, then, with his anxious, horror-stricken mind, cast himself before the mercy-seat for free justification and effectual help, humbly imploring the Divine Spirit to impart the consolation arising from the pardon of his sins by the death of Christ, and ability to serve him in newness of life. Never will he attain enlargedness of heart, or taste the full happiness of a religious life, until he has acquired the divine art of "casting himself wholly on the Lord," taking hold of his strength to be at peace with him."

But when the depression arises from indulgence in some course of sin, whether secret or open, the faithful physician must adopt quite a different therapeutics: here grace and the privileges of the gospel are not the topics to be employed, at least until much preliminary work has been accomplished, and that *thoroughly*. The conscience must first be roused from its asphyxed state to do its office. The whole moral condition of the individual, the heart, the affections, the conduct, must be subjected to a rigid scrutiny; for the only effectual remedy, in such a case, is to eradicate the cause of the mischief. The poisoned tree must not be pruned, nor simply cut down, but torn up by the roots. If prayer in secret has been neglected,—habits unfavorable to the growth

of religion have been indulged; if a lax and remiss walk with God has been admitted; if lust or covetousness, or pride, or pleasure, or wrath, have gradually got possession of the sceptre so as to control the practical will; if he slanders, or refuses to pay his just dues, or keeps false weights, — the advice to be given is perfectly obvious: we must *part from our sins, or our religion.* There is no middle way. Any one habitual transgression, deliberately committed, undermines all the moral energies of the soul, and positively excludes from the kingdom of heaven. "Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of such things the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness?" It is of no consequence, how necessary the passion or practice may have become to you. It may be as dear as a right eye or right hand; but, though dear as life itself, you must renounce it, Christian professor, or God will renounce you. To persist in the forbidden thing for a single day may have eternal issues. To excuse or hide it by an affected sanctity in other respects, by austere punctiliousness in matters of the tithe, mint, and cumin, is only adding one criminality to another, and doubling the peril: one thing is certain, your depression will continue. Your very conversion becomes a serious question, and can only be resolved in your favor by promptly returning to the King's highway which you have so unwisely and wickedly deserted.

In illustration of this, let me give an anecdote recorded of that remarkable man of God, whose praise is in the churches, the Rev. Asahel Nettleton. A clerical friend was assisting him in New Haven, during a great revival of religion which was in progress, and, in passing through the circle of inquirers, he came upon a man who had long made a profession of religion, but suffered under such a terrible dejection of spirit that he was ready to give up all as lost; and had come to the conference to know if anything could be done for one in so hopeless a condition. The clergyman related the interview to Mr. Nettleton, who, after a slight pause, replied: "I think I know the man, and I know the cause of his trouble. In my conversations with him I have repeatedly taken in his breath, which indicated a pretty free use of liquor, not probably to the extent of intoxication, but in sufficient measure to intercept communication with the source of all spiritual comfort; for I have always observed," he added, with his peculiar intonation, "that the two excitements, that of the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the *still*, can *never live together*." A day or two after, he frankly disclosed his suspicions to the individual. With strong crying and tears he admitted the charge, solemnly abjured the practice of alcoholic stimulation, and in a short time was rejoicing with the happiest in the peace that passes understanding. Verily, it is a truth, which we all should remember with great searchings of soul, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

Should, however, long-continued, stunning afflic-

tions be the principal cause of grief, the sufferer's view should be taken off from *his own particular trouble*, and directed to God's general dealings with his servants. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." He must also have his mind kept closely pressed with the remembrance of his demerits. "Wherefore should a living man complain, — a man for the punishment of his sins?" Nor will the suggestion be unprofitable, that to reach heaven at last, no matter through how many fires we must pass, is infinitely better than a smooth, flowery way to hell. Salvation is a blessing worth a thousand times its cost, cost what it may. The sorrows encountered on the road, if we are duly exercised by them, will only heighten the joy that awaits its termination. Only, then, raise your hearts to the source of all light and consolation, the Elder Brother, who trod the dolorous way before you, and hear him saying in the darkest hour, "Fear not, neither be dismayed; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right arm of my righteousness." In a word, let the child of affliction *never give up hope*. With this sheet-anchor he can defy the most driving tempest that ever blew; *without* it, he will make shipwreck, should a zephyr breathe a little rudely. "Do but despair," says our great poet, "do but despair, and if thou wantest a cord, the smallest thread that ever spider wove will strangle thee."

I have one word to add for the consideration of my irreligious readers, and it is this: that though they may amuse themselves and others with the dejection which sincere Christians often endure, and crack

many a merry joke on the long faces they pretend to see among them, yet they have exceedingly small reason for self-congratulation. They are free from religious fears, and *why?* I say, *why?* Because they *are without religion.* The fears of a pious man are frequently ungrounded, but those of an ungodly one always come short of the reality; and, though they may be repressed *just now*, will overtake him at last with crushing force. A careless life is very apt to be followed by a wretched death. To be without the occasional sadness which preys upon the spirit of the faint-hearted Christian, might be very well; but to be without his repentance, his faith, his love, his hope of heaven, — deficient in liveliness as it may be, — indicates a state of extreme and urgent peril. If there is a reasonable fear in the world, the man has grounds for it who finds himself in this predicament. Let him, before it is too late, rouse all his powers to seek after God. Let him flee for mercy to the foot of the cross. Then, and then only, will he be able to judge aright of the religious dejection of those whom he now despises; and will acknowledge that their sharpest griefs are more to be desired than the worldling's finest joys.

Do your Own Business.

VIII.

DO YOUR OWN BUSINESS.

1 *Thess.* 4 : 11. And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business.

THERE are subjects in practical religion of vital importance, affecting the very essence of Christianity as a guide of human conduct, which its official expounders are tempted to quietly pass over; or, when on rare occasions presented, handle with silken gloves, under the influence of two different feelings. The one is an apprehension, not always ill-founded, that the faithful insisting on them may subject to the imputation of singling out a particular class of hearers, or individuals belonging to that class, as the butt of acrimonious personalities,—a mean and odious practice, from which every honorable mind recoils. The other is, a fear that they will be departing from their proper work, which is not to preach *law*, but *gospel;* as if the inculcation of social duties was not a part of it, and as if our Lord's Sermon on the Mount did not almost wholly consist of utterances on the very subjects which they, with many of their hearers, would almost banish from the pulpit. The slightest examination of the New Testament will refute this pernicious error. The truth is, and cannot be denied or evaded, that a large

proportion of its subject-matter stands in immediate relation, not to peculiarities of doctrine, — though these are always assumed as the foundation, — but to duties of the practical life. They are sometimes spoken of by good men, whose phylacteries are broader than their understanding, as "husks of dry morality." But they are husks which all of us need to be mixed in at least with our richer aliment, which, taken alone, would be too concentrated for our feeble powers of digestion. Many a religious professor suffers from the neglect of this caution. That exquisite moral sensibility, which starts back with horror from the smallest violation of relative duties to his fellow-men, has not been cultivated. The second table of the law has not been driven home to the conscience, *written there* as if with the point of a diamond. Hence his conduct in reference to it cannot bear a very close inspection. His mental health is evidently not robust; his diet (to use a figure) is too saccharine; instead of chalybeate and exercise, his professional adviser has put him on a course of Godfrey's cordial, which soothes for an hour, but weakens all the springs of life. On the Sabbath he weeps devoutly under the melting influence of an excellent sermon on justification by faith, or on the great and precious promises. On Monday, if the truth were known, he may be seen manipulating with a somewhat abbreviated yard-stick, or practising some other of the thousand tricks of dishonesty by which men contrive to defraud each other without fear of the civil tribunal. Such cases, we hope, are not numerous, but are frequent enough to put a weapon into the hands of

the mocking infidel, with which he attacks, not spurious pretences to religion, but religion itself. May not this want of rigid conscientiousness, — not to call it by the harsher name of practical antinomianism, — in the daily business and intercourse of life, be attributed in some degree to the cause which has been mentioned?

This is our apology for introducing a topic seldom treated, except in the way of general allusion, because belonging to an unpopular class, and not unpopular only, but branded, by some, as almost illegitimate. The apostle, however, is evidently of a different opinion, as you see he does not scruple to give it a place in his inspired teachings. His train of thought is the following: He, in the first place, exhorts his Thessalonian friends to "study to be quiet;" by which we may understand, a sincere endeavor to attain such a happy composure of mind that no agitations of disorderly passion, nor any outward assaults of fortune shall be able to ruffle it. A most desirable condition indeed, if connected, as it always should be, with faith in an all-wise, heavenly Providence. When the soul has struggled up to this calm repose in God, this sacred elevation above the pleasures and pains of the earthly life, it has already attained, in germ, its proper heaven, and can form a not indistinct notion of that completeness of felicity which awaits it beyond the grave. Let no one object that such a state must not be looked for here. There is no perfection, it is true, in anything beneath the sun. But what we say and maintain is, that the soul may make constant advances in this di-

rection, and the recorded experience of not a few, but many, who, like saintly Enoch, walked with God until "he took them," proves that the ideas, entertained by the ancient sages, of a profound philosophical serenity attainable in this life, are not entirely *dreams*.

It is not to be reached, however, without strenuous efforts. We must "study" for it, says Paul,—work before rest. We live in the midst of noise, fierce struggle, and endless agitation; among scenes where objects continually present themselves calculated to break in upon the most confirmed habits of tranquillity; a world of sin, affliction, death. And, moreover, every man has a "world" of turbulent passions in his bosom, which are not to be kept under without vigorous exertion. But, lest the apostle's doctrine be misunderstood, he adds the very important caution, "doing your own business." So far from intending, by the virtue he recommends, a stupid, idle apathy, like that of a Hindoo devotee or a cloistered monk, he declares it to be necessarily connected with action, with diligence, and untiring assiduity in performing the duties appropriate to the place and station we occupy in the world. But this is not all. His words convey another most pregnant and weighty intimation, namely, that it is *our own business* which we must do, and not that of other people; giving us distinctly to understand that of all enemies to true Christian quiet, the greatest is an officious thrusting ourselves forward into matters which do not belong to us. This is the thought on which I propose to enlarge.

There is no creature so generally despised as a meddler; and yet how few there are innocent enough in the matter to cast stones at their offending neighbor! It is not my design to show him up by a complete dissection, but only to point out two or three classes of people whom, doubtless, the apostle had directly in his eye, and some of whom may be in mine, though I do not know it.

We naturally take notice, in the first place, of the more harmless class of persons obnoxious to the charge, though they are by no means innocent, except by comparison. I mean those little, bustling searchers after news, who, without any definite motive, good, bad, or indifferent, but under a constitutional weakness of mind, busy themselves with collecting and placing in their budget every event, great or small, true or false, that may be said to have occurred within the circuit of half a county, — gathering up the fragments that nothing be left. These are, in their small way, extraordinary personages. In their sphere, you would take them to be so many *little gods*, for they seem to possess the attribute of omniscience. Scarcely a circumstance escapes them. They know precisely what happened at such a time, in such a place, in such a family; how far, to a hair, such an interesting business between certain parties is advanced; what the father said, and the mother, and the kindred in general; when it shall be brought to a close; and surcharged with this precious intelligence, they run to and fro with the most generous anxiety to make everybody as wise as themselves. Hold silence, they cannot. Like Elihu,

in Job, they say, "I am full of matter:" — "ready to burst like new bottles."

It must be conceded that the masses of information thus obtained are not always to be relied on. But why expect that such magnificent piles of knowledge, collected in a thousand ways, from a thousand sources, should be reliable? The wonder is that the adepts in this department of doing other people's business contrive to elicit so many grains of truth, often under circumstances the most unfavorable that can be imagined. There is no escaping behind thick clouds or stone walls from their eagle-eye; it penetrates the darkest shade of concealment, detects mysteries secret as the grave, and sees while yet very far off.

I have called these the more innocent class of meddlers, because they appear to be actuated by littleness of mind, not principles positively bad, and are, in fact, rather *childish* than *wicked*. They are generally to be found among the ignorant and idle, — those, who, destitute of solid knowledge and above the necessity of unremitting exertions for their support, find time lying heavy on their hands. Hence the striking and curious description, given by St. Paul, of the younger widows, in the fifth chapter of his first epistle to Timothy, where he represents them as idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busy-bodies. Being left probably in a state of worldly comfort, but entirely without that mental cultivation which would enable them to find resources in writing, reading, painting, music, and their own thoughts, they

were forced to seek enjoyment in the company of their neighbor; became daily, perhaps half-daily visitors, and, by an easy process, settled down into item-mongers and gossipers; for this was the natural consequence. The moment they discovered that their comfort materially depended on a walk to a friend's house in the neighborhood, they felt under imperative obligations to administer of such things as they had to his or her entertainment. How, otherwise, make sure of a steady welcome? And it is a well-known fact, that, however sensible people despise these little busy hummers of society, they often listen to their stories with considerable *gusto*, provided they discover no indications of malignity, or what is called a bad heart.

Leaving for the present these gnats of conversation, who buzz, but inflict no venomous wound, I proceed to take notice of a more hateful class, with which society is cursed in too great abundance. I mean those, who, actuated by natural spite and malevolence, interfere with their neighbors only to produce mischief, — inventing and carrying about the most atrocious stories, with their whole souls endeavoring to blow up the coals of contention between friends and relatives, — the father against the son, and son against the father; the husband against the wife, and the wife against the husband. How any in human form, above all, how any professing discipleship to the loving Jesus, can delight in such infernal accomplishments, is difficult to explain. But the fact is unquestionable that there are such officious demons, perhaps with smiling faces and silvery tongues, who

scarcely seem to take pleasure in anything beneath the sun, except in sowing suspicion and enmity in the bosom of confidence and tender affection. The worst of the matter is, these wretches too often succeed in their attempts; for the credulous, good-natured man, when he comes in contact with such an one, is ready to argue, "Surely, this worthy person speaks out of pure honesty and particular regard for me. Why else should he concern himself? It is none of his business." And thus, for the very reason that should induce him to abhor the venomous creature, lift it up, and cast it out of the door or window, he takes it to his confidence and becomes its victim.

Under the same head we place those, who, though not directly with the view of sundering the ties of friendship and intimacy, but from a censorious and fault-finding spirit *in general*, occupy much of their spare time and discourse in condemning their brethren, and passing uncharitable judgments on their conduct. Is a man of a free, sprightly temperament, — he shall be called loose, without fixed principles, and probably a debauchee. Is he a devout observer of all religious duties, — he is pronounced a canting hypocrite; if in some of his theological opinions he does not keep in the groove exactly marked out by his censor's creed and catechism, he is a heretic and concealed deist. If John comes neither eating nor drinking, they say he has a devil; if Jesus comes eating and drinking, then the cry is, "Lo, a glutton, a wine-bibber, and a companion of sinners." So difficult, not to say impossible, is it for even the most innocent not to fall under the lash of men whose un-

charitableness is always awake and on the watch. These are they who will never suffer any man's commendation to pass by them without ripping up something or other to his disadvantage; or at least misinterpreting the motives of those of his good actions the goodness of which they cannot impugn. If you ever hear them begin to praise any themselves, prepare to hear at the close some ill-natured exception,—a disparaging "*but*," that overthrows all the eulogy that went before. Justly are their tongues compared by the Psalmist to a sharp razor, which, when most smooth and oily, cuts the keener, and gives the deeper wound.

There is another description of persons who violate the precept in our text, namely, those who, from an overweening conceit of their own wisdom are extremely forward to give advice to all they meet, and will needs understand more of a man's business than himself. Uninvited they obtrude themselves on his attention, undertaking to prescribe as if they were his physicians, to arbitrate as if they were his judges. That we are all, in a certain sense and with proper limitations, our brother's keeper is a certain truth. Even Cain could not assert the contrary but in the way of an interrogation. That we are to do everything in our power to secure his well-being is part of that great social law which binds man to man. But this is entirely different from that pragmatical spirit we are speaking of. We have no right to consider our wisdom so divinely superior to the wisdom of others that we are entitled to interfere on every occasion with their plans and purposes. The true name

of this temper is *miserable vanity*, not brotherly kindness and affection. Much less may we break down the rules of courtesy established by society in order to tell our neighbor what *we* think of him. Too often has the violation of this canon of conduct by ignorant zeal occasioned evils which the utmost prudence could not repair.

We have thus enumerated four classes of persons who transgress the precept given in our text; and, going back upon our steps, we shall offer a few considerations, to each respectively, which, if well applied, may serve as a remedy to the pestilent humor we are exposing.

In the first place, as to those whom we pronounced the most excusable, namely, your vain and trifling spirits, who, as an offset to their want of wisdom, put in the plea of freedom from bad intention, they must have a care lest they imagine themselves entirely innocent. They are not innocent; for they degrade the dignity of their natures, and prostitute the noble powers of reason and imagination to the most ignoble uses. Consider, my good-humored, story-telling friend, that you were made for something better than to fetch and carry for the vain curiosity of fools. You say you mean no harm. Well, you don't. But how do you know that those, who drink in your endless prattle with such evident pleasure, are equally harmless in their purposes, and equally indisposed to make them serve a base end? A shrewd bad man does not need for certain purposes a better instrument than a loquacious fool. Remember, also, that, light and trifling as you may think your conduct, yet in those most exact scales in which God weighs all the actions

and words of men, even lightness and vanity shall be found ponderous. Reflect, also, on the solemn declaration of the wise man: "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin;" and the declaration of the great Master himself: "I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

As to what concerns the second class, namely, the malicious whisperers and sowers of strife, it is quite superfluous to show the greatness of their criminality, since they are universally condemned by the voice of God and man. Such is its loathsome nature, that an express law concerning it was incorporated in the Levitical code, and the violation of which stands in immediate connection with the crime of murder: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people, neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor;" and the apostle ranks whisperers and sowers of strife in the black list of those whom God gives over to a "reprobate mind, to do the things which are not convenient," and which those who do, are worthy of death. Well would it be for these assassins and incendiaries of society, if they gave such warnings the consideration they merit, — if they asked themselves what reception they expect from the God of peace and order, who, all their lives, as far as their bitter tongues could influence, have been promoting confusion, variance, and every evil work?

We pass on to the next; those who, though not intentionally, or deliberately malignant, are open to the general charge of being uncharitable, censorious, fond of intermeddling with their neighbor for no other

purpose but to spy out his faults and "pronounce" harsh decisions on his conduct. To these sir oracles I put the question, by what right they seat themselves on the throne of the Judge of all the earth, and issue forth maledictions before the time? Who are ye that judge another man's servant? Let him alone. To his own master he stands or falls. Why judge ye your brother, for ye shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. This is a reflection that cannot sink too deeply. Pronouncing, without a call of necessity, judgment upon others, is entering on a business *which does not belong to us*. Ah! is it not enough that the sinner, if impenitent, will receive a condemning sentence from Him whose right it is to pass it? Shall *we*, exposed to the same scrutiny, anticipate the dreadful doom that may fall equally on us both?

This suggests the question whether these indignant accusers are sure of their own spotless innocence. Are their hands so clean, that they dare to rigidly arbitrate over a single child of Adam? What man, acquainted with his own character, will dare to set up a tribunal over the *worst* of his race; or, if he dare, what manner of person ought he to be in all godliness and honesty? Let it be considered, moreover, that when our critics are persuading themselves that they have found holes and blemishes in their neighbor's garment of righteousness, they may be entire strangers to the *merits of the case*. It is seldom that a carper can reach the truth in any instance, and is therefore qualified to judge. Indeed, he seldom *wants* to know it. Having set his heart on a snarl, he marks only a few outward appearances, and rushes

to the desired conclusion at once; not reflecting that possibly, on a more thorough examination, appearances would be found altogether deceptive. How many are the errors of conduct which, by an ill-tempered, self-constituted inquisitor, are viewed and spoken of with the sternest disapprobation; yet turn out, when well sifted, to be mere venial offences, proceeding from education, the force of circumstances, ignorance, or bodily infirmity. You call, for instance, that young man who has just passed you in the street a thoughtless, giddy worldling, destitute of all religious principle, and most undoubtedly in the broad way that leads to destruction. You are sure of all this, because you have it from good authority that when he visits the great city he occasionally goes to a theatre and sometimes patronizes a dance. Now you are perfectly welcome, if it seems good, to query whether his standard of piety is quite so high as could be wished. But you must go not a jot farther. *It is not for you and me to make saints and devils at our pleasure.* That young man may have had an imperfect religious training. He may, during the important period when habits are permanently formed, have been far removed from examples of rigid nonconformity to the world. He may never have heard one expression of disapprobation breathed on the subject of these indulgences by any whom he was in the habit of respecting. In short, a thousand circumstances of defence might be alleged, with which you, his officious judge, are not acquainted. Thus stands the case, then, between you and him. You have so far been a *meddler* in the concerns of your neighbor,

as to become his accuser; whereas, had you carried your investigations a little further, and proved a more thorough-going busy-body, you would have been inclined to the mildest and most generous construction.

Next, you meet a man singularly unprepossessing in his appearance. You mark something sinister in his eye and whole expression, which reminds you of a felon whom you a long time ago saw upon a gallows. You tell your companion that you would not meet that fellow on a dark night in the public road for a large estate. Such is the casket. Open it and you find a jewel there of which Christ has few more bright in his earthly crown. He is in constant communion with holy thoughts and heavenly aspirations. His heart beats warmly to God and man; and, if not distinguished by deeds of charity, it is because the poor soul stands himself in need of them. So, *judge*, it seems that you are again mistaken.

Yonder is a female whom, from some striking peculiarity of dress, you take to be a daughter of vanity,— lost to all sentiments but those of pride and self-admiration; absorbed in the frivolous gayeties and pleasures of the world. It is impossible for you to think well of her in such a garb. Now it is not contended that you have no right, as a question of taste, to discuss people's dress, or criticise their hats and ear-rings; though you might better leave them to the judgment of the milliner and goldsmith. But *we* do insist, that, before taking the trouble of uttering one damnatory sentence on the wearer, in point of religion, morals, or even good sense, you review all the circumstances that might be pleaded

in her defence by an intelligent advocate. What if it were made to appear, that, from her earliest years, she has been habituated to the mode of dressing and degree of ornamentation which you disapprove; that the difference between it and your wife's is not so great as the difference between your means; that, so far from indulging the pride and intoxication you impute to her, she really feels less than many, of whom you judge favorably, — your *own* daughter, for instance. In fine, what if it could be made to appear, that, at the very time you were condemning her in your soul as a gaudy, gilded *fool*, she, all unconscious, was trembling under the thought of being a naked, helpless sinner before God; and that from a heart bursting with agony was rising up to heaven the silent prayer, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner"? Oh, you say, if all this could be fairly made out, I would retract. But how do you know that it *could not* be made out? Plainly you own yourself a stranger to the matter under adjudication; and how *dare* you offer conjectures founded on equivocal appearances as decisions on character and destiny? Let me affectionately exhort you, in the pithy language of the text, "to study to be quiet and do your own business," leaving your neighbor in the hands of Him who searches the heart, and judges righteously.

With regard to those, in the fourth place, who, on all occasions, are so free with their advice and counsel, I ask them to reflect what an insupportable pride and arrogance it is, to reckon themselves wiser than anybody else, and to think no man capable of rowing his own boat unless *they* are sitting at the

helm. For, however they pretend that their officiousness proceeds from good nature and benevolence, we will find, on examination, that the true motive is that we have assigned. Such, at least, is the construction put upon it by the general voice of mankind. It would also be seasonable to put to themselves the same question which the pestered old man, in an ancient poem by Terence, puts to an overkind neighbor who would force his opinion on him. "Have you so much leisure from your own affairs, that you must be quite idle unless you take care of mine?" Let them attend further to this consideration. Either their kind counsel will be followed, or it will *not*. If not, — which is most likely, what thanks have they? They have only the mortification to find themselves treated according to their probable deserts, — as idle interlopers, whose opinion is as weak as it is presumptuous; and this, as I have said, is the common result. But grant it adopted. Then, he is fairly responsible for the consequences. Now, it is morally impossible that he who is always busy, and projecting for himself or for others, should invariably succeed. If it be his own business that miscarries, he can forgive himself, and is entitled to our sympathy; but if, without a call, and without occasion, he has been pressing his counsel on a friend, and thereby brought him into a tight place, is it not perfectly reasonable that he bear not only all the blame, but all the damage, too?

I allow that this argument is inapplicable to that sort of officiousness which relates to *religion;* there no disappointment nor damage can follow from ad-

hering to good advice. But there are evils of another kind which deserve to be well thought of by those good men who affect a general care of souls. It cannot be denied, for instance, that when one takes upon himself gratuitously the office of an exhorter, he holds forth something like an exhibition of his own superior wisdom and piety. He may not be aware that such an impression is produced; but so it actually is, however far from his intention. Connected with this is the suspicion that in his friendly admonitions there is involved a direct comparison between himself and the person whom he desires to benefit. Now, there are few who can meekly bear a comparison entirely to their disadvantage; much less when made by the party on whose side the advantage lies. If not disposed to rise up indignant against his claims, they at least think it intolerable in him to advance them *in their very teeth*, and thus, in the outset, a principle of resistance is called up which effectually bars the intended good. Nor can it be concealed that the adviser, unless eminent by weight of character, exposes himself to disagreeable suspicions as to the purity of his motives. Why, reasons the other party, have *we* been selected from the whole host of mankind to be the objects of his benevolent regard? What has put him in such a tremble for our particular souls; when there are so many souls all around, in whom, it might be supposed, unless he had by-ends to answer, he would take a deeper interest?

I would recommend, therefore, to those who, in their pious zeal, are bent on the enterprise of reforming

one or more of the immortal beings in their vicinage, to weigh well the ground on which they stand, and remember the old proverb, "Look before you leap." Knowing the rooted prejudice against meddlers and busy-bodies, in the minds of most, let them wait for such a turn of events as will prevent their exposure to this imputation, and then they may proceed with all the vigor and fidelity the case demands. On the other hand, let them remember that precipitance will not only prove ruinous to their project, but, perhaps, draw down upon them no little mortification and disgrace. The study and knowledge of human nature must never be neglected by one who seeks to do human nature good. In short, there are evils, and even wickedness in our neighbor which should be endured in *silence*, for the excellent reason that interference will only make the matter worse. Above all, this is true when interference takes the form of denunciation. Few evil spirits have ever been cast out by *scolding*, even though conjoined with prayer.

We shall bring our remarks to a close by summing up the whole matter in a single thought, with which, indeed, we have endeavored to make you already familiar. It is, that we have business enough, and more than enough, to occupy us, without seeking employment abroad. Doubtless, this holds true in the lowest sense, — in reference to the mere concerns of the present life. But what are these when compared with preparation to meet a holy God, and the retribution of eternity? Here is a work which will try all our business activities, if we set about it in the right spirit. There are difficulties to be surmounted, evil

passions to be subdued, virtues to be acquired, temptation to be overcome, which leave no room for a moment's leisure to trespass on other men's fields of labor. In the name of the Lord, then, let us be up and doing,—*for ourselves*. There is no time to interfere with our fellow-servants, for our own work is not done, nor will be till we are summoned to the reward. Happy man is he who, persuaded of this, endeavors to prove himself faithful by the assiduous discharge of his duties, and constant watchfulness over his heart, from which are the issues of life. He pursues the even tenor of his way in peace and quietness. Taking no part in the din and turmoil of the world beyond the circle of social responsibilities, he makes steady advance in preparation for the solemnities of the judgment, and at last has the blessedness of finding his work done, and done well, because the doing it engrossed the undivided energies of his soul. Do you aspire after this blessedness? Then listen to the exhortation of the apostle: "Study to be quiet, and do your own business," making "your calling and election sure."

The Principal Thing.

IX.

THE PRINCIPAL THING.

Proverbs 4 : 7. Wisdom is the principal thing.

THE attentive reader of holy Scripture does not need being told that the leading word of our text is used to denote not wisdom *in general*, but the special branch of it which stands related to our duties as creatures of God and expectants of future happiness. As to its nature, more particularly, the whole idea is expressed by that word with which we are so familiar, in theory at least, if not in practice, — "*religion*," — religion in its widest compass, including profound reverence for the Almighty Being who created us; a cordial belief in the revelation given of his will, genuine repentance for sin, and universal self-dedication to the great purposes in view of which we have been placed in the world. It is, in short, the soul's outspoken consciousness of her higher nature and upward movement, on the wings of faith and love, to her immortal home. Various names are given it in Scripture, as the fear of the Lord, a new heart, the incorruptible seed, the wisdom that cometh from above. Its transforming influence extends like a potent medicine to all the powers of the soul. In the understanding, it is a change in our per-

ceptions, opinions, and reasonings concerning spiritual objects; in the conscience, it is a lively, tender sensitiveness regarding moral obligation; in the judgment, it is an approbation of the things which are most excellent; in the will, it is an entire concurrence with the divine, — the result of all of which is progressive holiness in temper and conduct. Our text speaks of it as *one thing*, because, whatever may be its particular modification, it is always "one" sacred principle of divine life. As the body has many members, and yet is but *one* body; as a tree has many branches, and yet, with all its magnificence of fruit and foliage, is but *one* tree; as mankind consists of various races, and yet there is but *one* human nature, — so religion is a blessed unity, a universal soul-vitality, evincing itself variously, and in unequal degrees, but never out of harmony with itself.

I proceed now to show that this one thing is the *principal* thing. It is not a convenience, adding simply to our comfort, with which we can dispense, or for the want of which we can compensate by ingenious substitutes; it is not a mere sentimental luxury, like the gratification of our taste for literature, or the beauties and sublimities of nature, or the products of ingenious art. Religion is more than all this. It is a *necessity*, compared with which all other necessities shrink into utter insignificance! And the fact can be made clearly to appear, by comparing it with the various other objects to which worldly men are inclined to give the preference. What are they? That which occurs most readily to thought is an ample abundance of the wherewithal to answer the

importunate and ever-pressing question: "What shall I eat?" etc.; in other words, a prosperous, worldly condition, a well-secured income, that will not only keep the wolf from the door, but place at command all the innocent luxuries and refinements of civilized life. It would be extreme affectation to say that these things are unimportant, and do not enter into a wise man's estimate of happiness. A care to provide comfortable support for ourselves and dependents is not only allowable and wise, but sternly obligatory on the conscience. Indeed, so far is religion from countenancing sloth, and a wilful neglect of the means for improving, within reasonable limits, our earthly condition, that it rules a man of this character out of the church, pronouncing, "that he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

But surely the value of these objects of pursuit is only relative and comparative. They take their denomination of "*necessary*," merely from their reference to the present earthly existence; are not indispensable to the divine principle within us that aspires after celestial pleasures. We may be straitened in outward circumstances, — houseless, friendless, at a loss for daily food, — yet possess the true riches; our bodies clothed in rags, and yet our spirits (the true man within us) arrayed in heavenly attire. The poor earthly tabernacle in which we sojourn for a night, rather than can be said to dwell in, may be broken up and perish for want of common sustenance, and yet the immortal inhabitant be fed with living bread, — have meat to eat that passers-by know not of, and well might envy. Or, is a highly cultivated intel-

lect enriched with all the treasures of ancient and modern science, the principal thing? That it ranks high among human distinctions cannot be doubted. An acquaintance with human nature, and *God's nature*, — in the midst of which we are placed to survey it, and adore the glorious Author, — a knowledge of the history of the world and the dependencies of things around us, are admirable accomplishments, investing the possessor with a grace and dignity that raise him far above the level of those not so favored. Nor is the benefit derived from them inconsiderable. They minister in every way to our comfort and happiness. Nothing more true than the adage, of which the epoch in which we live furnishes so many wonderful illustrations, *knowledge is power*.

But, notwithstanding, mental accomplishment is not the principal thing. We see it confirmed by every hour's observation of what passes around us, that a man may be wholly rude and uncultivated, and yet be both a good, and a happy man, a useful member of society, and a joyful expectant of future blessedness. Nay, it is possible, and not *very* rarely happens, that men of extraordinary abilities and attainments are destitute, not only of the grace of God, but common integrity and an average share of happiness. These things can never give either peace or purity to the conscience; they can never hush the cry of the soul after something better. Many a sage philosopher, whom science ranks among her demigods, may look with envy on the poor old domestic, who makes his broth, and whose learning does not extend a hair beyond. He can measure the

size and distance of the planets; explain all the wonders of chemistry and magnetism; pursue a mathematical problem to heights never before trod by human genius, and with all this, ignorant of the true end of life, he may, in God's estimation, be a *very fool*. The old woman, scarcely able to spell her way through the first chapter of John, may have unlocked there treasures of wisdom which our Solomon never dreamed of, and which elevate her so far above him that they can hardly be deemed to partake in a common nature.

Another blessing, which ranges high among the desirables, is a robust physique, a frame all compact, of sinew, bone, and muscle, with well-strung nerves, —a vigorous circulation of rich oxygenated blood, a good digestion that says to disease, "Aha!" when it cometh, and leaps up from its occasional prostration like a giant refreshed with wine. Well, earth, *mere* earth, has nothing that should be more earnestly coveted. "Without a sound mind in a sound body," as the ancient philosophers expressed it, a boundless command of the means of sublunary enjoyment could not impart even the mockery of happiness. Cast the greatest monarch in the world on his bed, under a lingering, painful complaint, from which there is little prospect of recovery, and ask his meanest scullion whether he would exchange situations with him. "Exchange with such a wretch!" would be the reply. "*I*, with my warm blood dancing merrily through every artery and vein, feeling an elastic spring in every joint, eating the dryest crust with appetite and relish, sleeping my nine hours,

every night, without so much as once turning over on the other side! No; a thousand kingdoms would not tempt me to parley a moment with the thought." Beyond a doubt, health is a blessing of priceless value. Of all the cases of self-murder I have read of, the most excusable (if the epithet may ever be applied to a crime so unnatural) is that of an unhappy man, who, suffering from a malignant cancer which the physician pronounced incurable, immediately retired to a chamber and blew out his brains. Yet, even health is not the principal thing. A man may enjoy it to the end of his finger-nails without being happy. There are even those to whom it is an unmitigated curse, in consequence of its abuse. The talent was employed in gratifying the lowest sensual propensities. Their strength was given up to indulgences which put out the eyes of their understanding, corrupted all that was pure in their affections, and seared the conscience as with a red-hot iron; so that at the close of their career, they were ready to exclaim, "Oh, that I had never enjoyed a day of health in my life. Continued sickness would have saved me from the most dreadful of calamities to which I am now a hopeless victim."

Observation, also, teaches that true piety is an effectual *substitute* for bodily health when it is wanting. Some of us have seen persons afflicted with such terrible forms of disease that we wondered how it was that they did not, like Job, curse the day on which they were born; yet, enabled by divine grace to bear up under their sufferings with the sweetest patience and heavenly serenity. They were blessed

with seraphic visions, — talked with angels, and held ravishing communion with their Saviour at the very time every fibre was racked with agony. Some time since, a poor man died near Boston, whom the newspapers described as having laid thirty years on his back, in a state of helplessness and torment almost incredible. During the whole period he was unable to raise *a hand*. He could not move himself on his bed, nor masticate his food, — a thin liquid, sucked in by his lips, being all that supported nature. Every day he was seized with spasms which convulsed his whole frame so fearfully that the spectacle could not be endured, and visitors were obliged to leave the room. Yet, in the midst of all, he was continually praising God for his unspeakable mercy; — declaring to those around, how happy he was in the opportunity of glorifying the grace of that Saviour who had plucked him, a poor worthless brand, from the burning. He died in the triumph of Christian faith, and went joyfully up to the blessed land where the inhabitant shall no more say "I am sick."

Character, or the good esteem of mankind, is another of earth's pleasant plants. A generous mind feels a noble satisfaction in being highly appreciated, especially by the wise and good. But how often is the passion carried far beyond its due limitation. To be exalted above the common level, — to be deemed great, talented, honorable, — to have one's name in every mouth, and, perhaps, trumpeted in every newspaper, — many account the topmost bough in the tree of human felicity. Alas, how sad the deception! What vain shadows and froth-bubbles are all the

honors of this transitory scene, when estimated at what they are truly worth. A good name may be better, as the wise man tells us, than precious ointment; but he never tells us that it is the "principal thing." One may possess it, and yet be eminently unhappy. On the other hand, though it be enviously withheld, he may enjoy the most placid composure and peace within. We know who has left, as a legacy to his followers, this remarkable beatitude: "Blessed are ye when all men speak evil of you."

We note, finally, the pleasures of love and friendship. We are made for society, and could not live without its solace. The happiness of heaven consists in its perfection. Friendship is a firm barrier against many evils, by providing us with counsel and reproof, assistance and sympathy. He who has a judicious and faithful adviser, though he ranks with the meanest of mankind, is happier than the throned monarch, who, surrounded with obsequious courtiers (not friends), shines in all the pomp and splendor of lonely greatness. What is true of friendship in its restricted sense applies to all the kindly affections that bind man to man, — the love of parents and children, husband and wife; love of country, and the godlike principle of general benevolence that takes in all intelligent beings. The happiness springing from these sweet charities of life is pure as well as exalted, and they are so often called into exercise by the routine of daily duty that they may be said to form the main staple of human enjoyment. Hence, many are to be found, especially among the gentler and more finely attuned spirits, who build an altar to

the household deity exclusively, seeking happiness nowhere but in the bosom of domestic privacy, with the occasional society of a few friends united by congenial tastes and opinions. Perhaps, of all plans to while away life without the aid of religion, this is the most plausible. But it will *not do*. Love and friendship are admirable gifts of Providence, but they are not "the principal thing." The objects of our regard, however dear, may deceive us; if not deceive, sadly disappoint, and from one moment to another we tremble lest they be violently torn from our embrace. There are a thousand external ills which flesh is heir to, where affection speaks in vain; much less can it heal the spirit broken by a sense of sin. On the other hand, there have been those, who, deprived of all endearing connections, have yet enjoyed divine pleasures, living in the light of His countenance whose smile can irradiate the darkest dungeon.

We shall extend no further this comparative view, but proceed to enforce it (perhaps at the risk of a little repetition), by pointing out how truly unhappy the man, who prefers the world to religion, is in all conditions, particularly these three: first, a good one, or what he deems such; second, a bad one, which is really such; third, his condition when he must, however reluctantly, meet his summons to appear before the Divine tribunal.

Suppose, first, all his schemes succeed according to his wishes. He rolls in wealth, is honored with offices of power and trust, has numerous friends and dependents, among whom he disports himself like

leviathan among the minnows. His ample resources place within his reach all the gratifications so agreeable to his sensual nature. *There* he is, flourishing like a green bay tree; and now will you say that this man is happy. I say, no! Being unreconciled to God and holiness, his blessings become snares and pitfalls. His spreading branches only make him a broader target to the poisoned arrows of the tempter. Turn your eye from all this glare, and look *into his heart*. The depraved passions of human nature reign there without a check, — somewhat tamed it may be by circumstances and culture, still supreme. His abundance produces no content. He yields to his lusts, and yet his lusts are not satisfied, ever crying with the horse-leech, "Give, give." Thus, his acquisitions make him really poor, because they increase his desires. His pride, ambition, jealousy, covetousness, malevolence toward those who stand in his way, are all kept in a state of constant irritation. New temptations lead him captive to new sins. Serious thoughts, if he ever had any, fade away from the mind; above all, thoughts of God and obligation. As the religious soul, by its habitual communing with pure and exalted ideas, grows itself more pure; his, for the opposite reason, becomes more gross and earthy. He would like to carnalize the object of worship, to frame a conception of him, not as the high and holy One whom no man hath seen, nor can see, but as a huge, robust animal with a moral nature as low and unspiritual as his own, — like pagan Jupiter. Such is the tendency, the nature, and proper working, of unsanctified prosperity. Few

successfully resist its influence, or avoid drifting on the rocks to which they are carried by its fatal tide.

Let us now reverse the scene, and look at our spoiled child of fortune when lying in the depths. He is stripped of his blushing honors, reduced to poverty, languishing under the pains and weaknesses of declining nature, deserted by those who formerly made the loudest professions of devoted attachment. How, in these circumstances, can he sustain himself? That by a constitutional stoicism he may be able, in some degree, to stifle the feelings of nature may be granted. But how is it possible he should enjoy a real inward serenity? There is no divine bosom to which he can fly where he may quiet his sobs, no Providence to confide in, no divine aids to strengthen, no promise of better blessings to speak courage and gladness. Such a man, in the midst of the dark and thick tempest around him, must be of all men most miserable.

Certainly, then, it would seem, that religion is the *principal thing*, — principal even for this world, chief in prosperity, yet more so in adversity; chief in the sunshine and the dark cloudy day; chief everywhere and always. The man of business, incessantly engaged in pursuits which occupy his thoughts and give him sensible pleasure, may be able to evade, in some degree, the force of what has been said, — avowing that he has not, in point *of fact*, experienced that absolute indispensableness of piety contended for either in good or adverse fortune. There is another condition, however, on which he has not yet experimented. He *must die*. There is no es-

caping from that inexorable law which ordains that dust must return to dust, and the spirit to the God who gave it. Yes, he *must die*, and what provision shall he make for his passage? There are many, we are aware, who never ask the question; whose innate stupidity puts them beyond the reach of all attempts to awaken reflection. This, however, is not commonly the case; and where there is a capability of looking steadily out on the prospect that spreads before the imagination, especially when conscience is thoroughly roused, how pungent must be the agony. Some of us can speak on this subject from observation. Perhaps we have stood by the bed of a departing man of the world whom death has surprised in the midst of his projects and pleasures. His image is still before us, and his sad accents are tolling in our ears, whenever we abstract ourselves from the noisy din of our worldly occupations. "Every earthly scene is passing away from me. The bonds of nature are just dissolving; and as to this vain mockery of life to which I have given my heart, my hopes, my all, I am already dead, — as dead, to all intents, as if to-morrow had come, and I were lying in my coffin; and what have I to expect? To see the dawning of a heavenly morning? I dare not hope for it. God's mercies I have abused. I have slighted his warning, despised his grace, affronted the blessed Saviour, and I fear I am undone." How sad a spectacle is this! An immortal being going down into darkness, perishing under the blaze of the eternal gospel. In the midst of his strong cryings and tears, the curtain drops; and upon the naked, helpless soul

eternity pours all its tremendous realities. Ah, that awful word, *eternity!* We are swallowed up — we are lost in the idea. When millions of ages have rolled by, the undying spirit will be but commencing to exist; and if, during its probation, deliberately unfaithful to solemn responsibilities, but commencing to pay the forfeiture. We know little of the precise manner in which the law of retribution will be enforced; the representations of Scripture on the subject being in the highest degree figurative. But surely enough is known to make the most thoughtless serious. Utterly rejecting the dogma of physical torture, it is impossible to doubt that there will be such elements of unhappiness in constant activity as these: deprivation of all the enjoyments appropriate to our animal, and more especially our spiritual, nature; abandonment to ungratified desires, and the rage of malevolent passions; being cast out from the presence of God in the character of a friend, yet having him always before the eye as a judge, and, in a certain sense, though we do not like the expression, as an enemy; the writhing of an eternal remorse, with the cutting reflection that nothing in this is arbitrary, — all is merited, and, according to the laws of moral order, inevitable. Let no one say that irreligious happiness can have any other ending than misery. The game may seem to open well; appearances in its further progress may be highly flattering, and the pleased fool may think his adversary asleep. But he does not see the fatal defeat that is preparing for him; how certainly he shall awake from his dream to the discovery that he has lost his all. "The

day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night; for when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

There is a story told of an ancient heathen tyrant, which contains a moral suggestive of many serious thoughts on this subject. He had become remarkable, far and near, for the good fortune that attended all his enterprises, which puffed him up with the conceit that he was the special favorite of the gods. One day he, in the way of experiment, dropped a precious signet-ring in the sea, at a great distance from the land, which, sure enough, was brought back in safety on the following morning,— having been taken from the belly of a fish which had swallowed it, when in the act of sinking. His triumph was unbounded; and, by his order, the strange occurrence was reported to all the neighboring sovereigns. On being informed of the affair, his best ally, the king of Egypt, — a wise and thoughtful prince, — instantly *renounced all intercourse* with him, saying that his unparalleled prosperity could not but be an omen of some fearful catastrophe in which he and his people might be involved. It was, in his judgment, a thing not to be credited that Providence designed such felicity, especially in the case of a bad man, to be enduring. The prediction was soon verified. Calamity came upon him so tremendous and overwhelming that men's ears have tingled at the recital for the last two thousand years, and his name is one of the beacons of history. So shall it be with all the pride and pomp of those who,

in their exaltation, give not God the glory. They are raised up to heaven that their fall may be the greater when he casts them down to hell.

In closing, I beg you to weigh what has been said, with care and solemn deliberation. Our remarks have been neither sparkling nor profound; but they are worthy of all regard for the subject's sake. You are, every one of you, immortal creatures, soon to account with the great Proprietor for the talents, whether one, two, or ten, which he has committed to you; some of your number are undoubtedly strangers to that *good part* without which you are equally unfit to live and die. Be wise in time, and make yourselves acquainted with God, before he cause darkness.

A word to the young. For you, also, religion is the principal thing. We have no interest to deceive you. No other motive can actuate us in urging its claims than regard to your true welfare. We do want you to live in the fear of the Lord. We want you to begin now; because, we believe, he calls you to it now; because he has given precious promises that they who seek him early shall find him, and because neither you nor I know whether an extended opportunity will be afforded. Come, young friends, get up to the work of searching for the divine treasure. Listen to the voice of wisdom. Compare the decisions of Scripture with those of the oracle within you, — *your own conscience*, — and see how completely they accord. Balance the interests of this world with the interests of another; retire to

your closets, and there, on bended knee, pray God that he may be found. So we would most heartily commend you to his boundless mercy in Christ, and the mighty influence of his grace and Spirit.

Vain Thoughts.

X.

VAIN THOUGHTS.

Jer. 4 : 14. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

IN these words the prophet compares the heart of man to a house of vulgar entertainment, where guests of every description congregate, except the respectable, and are permitted to revel without contradiction or control. These guests are vain, sinful thoughts, which, like so many drunken rowdies, are constantly coming in and going out, making it an eternal scene of confusion and riot. The indictment is a true one so long as the heart is unrenewed by the Spirit of God. We know it will be extremely difficult to impress this conviction on many minds. No small part of the evil charged is the soul's loss of moral sensibility, so that it cannot be made to see how dim and blighted a thing it is, compared with itself as it first came from the divine hand. Yet we think a careful attention to the workings of their own minds will convince the most sceptical that there is too much justice in the representation of the text.

Our purpose is to give some illustrations of this subject. We shall not declaim; and we shall pass over the more crimson sins of thought, confining

ourselves to what the text calls their *vanity;* adducing such proofs as will appeal to the consciousness and experience of all.

Our text needs little explanation. The word "vain" sometimes means, in the holy Scriptures, *unprofitable.* All is vain, says the wise man, because "there is no profit of them under the sun." This is, doubtless, one idea of the text. It sometimes means *light*, as in the phrase "lighter than vanity." This, also, may be predicated, for the most part, of our thoughts. They are destitute of all pith and solidity. Like Belshazzar's, the most profound and serious are weighed and found wanting. Occasionally it means *frail*, *inconstant.* This, also, applies to them. They pass off and are forgotten, like froth-bubbles on the running stream. Lastly, vain is used for sinful. Thus, the wicked are called "*vain sons of Belial.*" Such, too, is the prevailing character of our thoughts. They are disobedient to law, deflections from that most perfect rule which has respect to the inner man, and consequently expose to the divine displeasure.

These things premised, we enter on our topic, and observe,—

First, that the vanity of the mind appears in a want of ability to extract devotion from the ordinary occurrences of life. The various dispensations of Providence are the appointed means of exciting within us pious emotion; and the truly sanctified heart improves them to this end. Out of all God's dealings, all the objects presented, to be seen or enjoyed, it distils sweet and spiritual meditations.

So it was, no doubt, with our first parents before apostasy had closed upon them the gates of Paradise. Walking among the loveliest scenes, the eye feasted with beauty, the ear enraptured with melody, — so far from surrendering themselves to epicurean and idle enjoyment, they continually ascended from nature up to nature's God. Whatever they saw and felt was his memento. The dew that glittered on the rose-bud, the leaves that adorned the trees, the grass that carpeted the earth, the flowers and the singing of birds, did not so much please the sense as elevate their pure souls to gratitude and praise. It was the same with him who in all things was the pattern for our imitation, the blessed Jesus. Every object and casual occurrence that attracted his attention during his various sojournings started some train of holy thought. Did he hear of the murdered Galileans, — melting with pity for the thoughtless sinners who were before him, he exclaims, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Does he encounter a gathering of fishermen, — he invites them to be "fishers of men." Does he see a well, — he speaks of the water of everlasting life. Does he taste wine, — he looks forward to the new wine of his Father's kingdom.

And this is the characteristic of every well-constituted mind. As the bee sucks honey from the flowers, so from all events it gathers aliment for its spiritual nutrition; changing, by a happy alchemy, the coarsest earth into gold, — "finding sermons in stones, and good in everything." On the contrary, look at the generality of men, ourselves, probably,

included. Is it not very plain that for the most part we look no further than a beast into the ways and workings of Providence; contenting ourselves with earthly satisfactions, without extracting from them one of those sacred uses for which they were certainly designed? When, for instance, injuries and insults are offered us, instead of being led like David, in the case of Shimei, to the devout ejaculation, "The Lord may requite us good," how we instantly begin to indulge thoughts of retaliation! When judgments befall men, — others, not ourselves, — instead of being led to serious reflection on the uncertainty of earthly things, and the danger of placing confidence in an arm of flesh, like Job's friends of old, we are found running out into heartless censures on the victim of calamity. When outward blessings are poured upon us, instead of rejoicing in their giver, we immediately enter into the self-colloquy, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry;" and when calamity betakes us, instead of joining the man of Uz, in that most beautiful of all sentiments, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," we take occasion to question the existence of a Providence, or impeach its justice. Are not these things strikingly corroborative of the truth we are impressing? Surely there is something radically wrong in us, when we are so unskilful in the happy art of making the ordinary occurrences of life ministers of devotion.

Secondly. The evil appears in a form still worse, in a positive unwillingness, a loathing to reflect with any

earnestness on serious themes. Like idle school-boys in the midst of their diversions, we entertain a secret horror at the thought of sitting down to the task befitting our immortal natures, of communing, for example, with our own spirits, and solemnly reviewing our actions, as probationers for eternity. Do you think this a little highly colored? Well, then, *try*. Go shut yourselves up in a place of retirement, and endeavor to concentrate your thoughts on some religious subject. Undertake to consider the solemn truth you have read or heard a few hours before, or to muse on some unexpected providence which has lately occurred in your neighborhood, with the view of improving it to your spiritual advantage; you will find what, had the trial been made, would have been found long before, that your vain heart does not "like to retain God in its knowledge;" that it is only by the lash that it is induced to look him in the face.

But, granting that the lash is applied, and that good thoughts are actually entertained, it is certain that the mind will not be *long intent on them*. On evil our meditations can dwell with surprising fixedness. Thus, "to devise froward things Solomon tells us a man shuts his eyes;" that is, he bends to it the most wrapt attention. But not so in the other direction. Here, what unsteadiness, what interruption! We are like the aforesaid school-boys called in from their diversions, and with their eyes screwed down on their task, while a thousand images dance through the mind in complicated confusion, like the dissolving scenes of a phantasmagoria. Take what precautions we may, our thoughts, like idle servants sent on an

important errand, are eternally excursioning to the right and left, occasionally coming back, only to start after some new vanity. Take a specimen in the house of God. Let us suppose that we have come here with a full purpose to honor divine institutions. The first stanza of the opening psalm solemnly impresses us, and, for a moment or two, we can say with David, "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; Lord, I will sing." But alas! before the completion of another, our truant spirits, like the fool's eyes, have gone to the ends of the earth. The like in prayer. You endeavor, according to the Master's orders, to watch unto prayer; to set, as it were, a watch at the door, that no disturbing thought may enter. Scarcely, however, are you fairly before the mercy-seat, when the harpies of idle imagination are polluting and devouring the sacrifice.

Closely connected with this is another fact, that, even when the mind succeeds in thinking good things, with some considerable fixedness too, yet it does so in a disorderly way, with no regard to sequence and connection. What the wise man says of words is true of thoughts, — "Fitly disposed, they are apples of gold in pictures of silver." This was exemplified in our first parents, before their fall from integrity, and *always* in the great High Priest of our profession. In them, not one of their thoughts was out of place. Like the stars of heaven, they were not only beautiful in themselves, but in their mutual harmony, — each marching on in regular procession and in its own orbit. Not only were they intrinsically excellent, but, like good soldiers, none ever stepped

out of rank. How different with us, and our hearts! View them in the duty adverted to a moment since, that of prayer. It is evident, that, in order to perform the service acceptably, not only all *secular ideas* should be absent, but even that none of a *devotional* character find entrance, except those of a prayerful description; such, I mean, as become a sinner on his bended knees. But scarce is the good man risen with the multitude to pray, than some pious anecdote is remembered, or some impressive sermon heard on a former occasion. While hearing the Word, instead of bending attention to the weighty truths *now* presented, he thinks of the solemn prayer that went before, or, from something that is said, takes occasion to cut loose from the messenger of God altogether, and think out, as it were, a sermon of his own.

This evil, however, is more general, and has a wider range than that assigned to it in the preceding remarks. In other things, beside religion, the same disorderliness and love of eccentric movement are exhibited. The rapid transition from one object of thought to another, without regard to logical connections, is not, in itself, positively sinful. But it is to be regulated by the fear of God and an enlightened conscience. A traveller is not always bound to keep the exact middle of the highway, but is a fool if he turns aside into every bog in pursuit of jack-o'-lanterns. The mind, however, scorns these proper limitations, and glories in being a vagabond through God's creation. It passes from one thing to another, not because allied to each other, but apparently in the mere wantonness of power. Scarcely is it here,

when lifting up our eyes we see it gambolling among the sun, moon, and stars. We can compare it to nothing so well as to a man bowling along in an express rail-car, at the rate of forty miles an hour, house after house, landscape after landscape rising up to view, and instantly retiring, as if they had not been seen. Now, we are criticising our neighbor's faults; anon climbing an Egyptian pyramid; at this moment picturing a scene of sensual enjoyment; in that which follows, thinking of the next election, hatching a scheme of profit, or conjecturing the appearance of the Emperor of China. It is characteristic of maniacs, that, though they undoubtedly exercise reason, there is no connection between their thoughts, — all is incoherence and confusion, like the scrawl of a mischievous child. We who go at large have this advantage, that it is in our power to do three things which they cannot, — disguise our mental operations, dispose in a proper order our expressions, and, above all, control our voluntary actions. But could these operations be seen precisely as they are, as much nonsense would be found in them, sheer and perfect nonsense, as in the wildest ravings of the maniac.

A fault opposed to this is the mind's too *great intensity* when under the influence of passion, — illustrating the old adage, that extremes often meet. For example, when we encounter a disappointment, how we brood over every circumstance that occasioned it, and linger round the evil, though its consequences are irretrievable. The very uselessness of our reflections seems to give them a fascinating power over us.

When calamity is threatening, though yet at a distance, to what gloomy musings does it give rise. How the heart meditates on terror! The little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, we magnify, by exaggerating fancy, into the precursor of a second Noah's deluge; and the affliction of to-morrow we contrive to double by making it the affliction of to-day. The like with ungratified desire. How intensely do we long for the completion of our wishes! Scarcely is our pillow visited with sound sleep till we enter on the hoped-for enjoyment; so that often when it actually arrives, it has lost its charm, and we suffer the pains and disgusts of satiety before possession.

The vanity of the mind, in the next place, evinces itself and its workings by an idle and unprofitable curiosity; a morbid hankering after the knowledge of matters in which we have no interest or concern. What, indeed, is the most of what the world formerly called learning, but a plausible form of this moral disease? What are the most of those profound metaphysical and transcendental speculations, which are still so much admired in certain circles, but "oppositions of science, falsely so called," ingeniously absurd conjectures about things beyond the comprehension of the human intellect? Admirably well are these cobwebs of the brain described by the apostle Paul, as "old wives' fables," invented to satisfy the cravings of children after something wonderful, and in fact unknown.

The same prurient curiosity is exemplified in the course of reading which many pursue, especially our youth. I do not pass an unqualified condemnation

on all our books of fiction. A good selection of them, used in moderation, may be read with advantage to the understanding and the heart. But there is a large number, and those, unfortunately, the most popular with a numerous class of readers, which are little better than *spiced carrion*, abounding in pernicious maxims, false views of life, and prurient descriptions thinly hidden under mawkish sentimentalities, — unredeemed by the least exhibition of fancy, wit, or knowledge of human nature. Even the delicate female sometimes contracts a taste for such offals, and may be found poring at the midnight hour over pages she would not venture to read under the eye of a parent or a Christian friend. Such is the power over her of that horse-leech, *depraved curiosity*, crying, "give, give," that the silly young creature denies herself natural rest in the employment of corrupting her imagination, inflaming her passions, and destroying her native purity of sentiment.

The same curiosity is displayed by many in their desire to know the secrets of those around them. How anxious are they to get the full measure of their neighbor's faults, to become acquainted with their pecuniary circumstances, and the least of their family arrangements! If some vague rumor to their disparagement be in the wind, how eagerly do they snuff it up, and eagerly impart it to brother and sister gossips, — agonizing in all the pains of parturition till the deliverance be accomplished! "*Did you ever hear that?*" What magic in these five little words, intoned with the emphasis befitting the sub-

ject and the occasion! How do they make the heart of the auditor palpitate, rouse the sleeping blood, and spread over her cheek the flush of delighted attention! How many bursts of eloquence —— But the subject is too solemn for irony. How many reputations have they murdered, and hearts have they broken! Into how many fountains of domestic happiness have they poured the venom of hell!

Another exemplification of our subject, — the vanity of the thoughts, — is concocting schemes for satisfying unlawful, at least exorbitant, desires, — "taking thought," as the apostle expresses it, "to fulfil the lusts of the flesh." Would men be rich, — wonderful are the pains they take to study out all the arts and tricks of the world for this purpose; often not scrupling, in their calculations, oppression and fraud. Indeed, it is this kind of mental application which gives the only evidence to us that some people have a soul. The speaker knew a man in his youth who, as was universally believed, on the strongest evidence (that of his wife and his physician), to have died of brain fever caused by a month's previous sleeplessness and nervous prostration. These had their origin in a fearful expenditure of intellectual energy on the question, how he could extort an additional bonus of three hundred dollars for a farm he had sold, but had not yet signed all the papers. The mental strain was too great for his frail tabernacle, and the brain succumbed! Would men rise to political distinction, — how carefully do they provide the ladder and count the steps! This man shall receive a *consideration;* that man's character

shall be spotted; this opponent will probably fall by his own weight; that one shall be removed by management. Thus is that superb intellect, designed by the Creator to hold communion with himself and all that is great and glorious in his universe, made an ignoble pimp to the lusts of its possessor!

Once more; the vanity of the mind shows itself in performing on the theatre of imagination those freaks and follies, not to say gross sins, which, from the circumstances of the case, cannot be performed actually. It often happens, that, our desires wanting opportunity for real gratification, fancy takes pencil in hand, and gives a sort of dramatic picture of it. *We all go to the theatre*, and have free tickets, for we are both the authors and actors, and the play is carried on in our own house. Take, for instance, the poor man. His delight is to imagine himself rich, and then to scheme plans of pleasure, erect castles in the air, the admiration of a thousand imaginary beholders. The rich man dreams, in his turn, of a chair of state. The young man relieves the tedium of standing all day behind the counter by the dream that he is a soldier, trampling on the bodies of hundreds whom he has slain by the prowess of his single arm; honored with the baton of field-marshal and the hand of some illustrious princess. We give those merely as cases. They may not be *yours*. But there is not an individual in this assembly, except those saved from it by a natural stolidity, who has not his day-dreams and planted some fool's paradise to walk in.

A vanity connected with this is the fondness for

thinking over our many excellences and endowments, — counting, studying, admiring them. How much of that priceless riches, *time*, is spent just in saying, *to one's self of course*, How rich I am, how fine, how respectable ! How many little Nebuchadnezzars are there in our cities who do nothing, and think of nothing but walking through the streets, lifting up their eyes to each of the big houses they have acquired, and saying, " Is not this the Babylon that I have built ? "

This vanity appears in the many fond expectations entertained concerning the future. Thus with the class of men spoken of by Isaiah, — " To-morrow shall be as this day and yet more abundant ; " and those described by James, — " To-morrow we shall go to such a city, and buy and sell, and get gain." So with many in our day : no sooner do they open their eyes to behold the sun, than they commence their plans ; — not plans of duty, but pleasure : To-day, I will close a bargain, and foreclose a mortgage ; to-morrow, I will give a dinner ; on the day after, I will take advice concerning laying out my new country-seat. And thus they endeavor to obtain a present happiness from the anticipation of future enjoyment, like thoughtless heirs before the legacy is due. In this way the generality of men pass their lives. Vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts being darkened, they take no note of the shortness of time. They do not look at the unutterably solemn realities which are perhaps waiting for them at the corner of the next street. Suddenly, in the midst of the farce, — for what else can such

a life be called, — they are cut down, and — *where are they? oh! where?*

From the subject discussed we draw two reflections, which, duly weighed, will convince serious hearers that we have not been putting them off with a satire instead of a sermon.

First. We here see an argument from *fact*, for the scriptural doctrine of a great primitive apostasy, which has shattered both our intellectual and moral nature. This is the moral of the whole story: *We inherit a fallen nature.* How, in any other way, account for that bondage to the most miserable vanity which enthralls the noblest of human minds? The infidel may prattle until he almost believes it, concerning the perfectibility of the race; the astronomer may descend from his observatory, and expatiate on the sublime greatness of the human intellect, because, with the help of good glasses, he has seen a star that was never seen before; the chemist, from his laboratory, may talk in the same strain, because, by a fortunate analysis, he has discovered a new elementary substance, or the composition of one previously considered simple. After all, fact, undeniable *fact*, proves that men are but children of a larger growth; and, that, whatever they once were, or by supernatural interposition may again be, there is little in their present *status* to titillate self-complacency. For our own part, when we read one of those amazing books which men of genius have produced, where not a word or thought is misplaced, and every sentence a gem of intellect or fancy, — no falling off, no occasional incongruities marring the general effect,

— in short, a perfect model of excellence, we exclaim: "What a mind! Surely, it belongs to a higher sphere! A god has come down in the likeness of men!" But the reverential feeling is sadly abated, when we reflect what this book would be, if it were a faithful mirror of the great man's thoughts as they actually passed through him. Now it is not our purpose to exaggerate the matter. We readily grant that this vanity is a mild type of what is called depravity or corruption. But it evinces at least a loss of balance among the powers of the soul; a preponderance of the low and trifling over the serious and dignified; an infirmity of will, disabling it from exercising a proper control over our mental operations, which could not exist in a being unscathed by apostasy. There must, therefore, have been a shock at some early period which has paralyzed our moral nature. Like a noble temple, lying under the ban of some unexpiated crime, it is given up to sordid uses, and has become a habitation for thieves and vagrants; for all sorts of creeping things, and unclean birds. But, thanks to the Father of mercy, the interdict is not eternal. It shall be rebuilt a glorious edifice, and made illustrious by the returning presence of the august Being by whom it was erected, who, reëntering his long-forsaken shrine, will say, "This is my rest forever; here will I dwell."

And this leads me to the topic of my second inference, the proof suggested by our subject of a future immortality. It may seem a strange logic to build so dignified and animating a truth on the cheerless and mortifying details we have been spreading before

you. To some they may appear actually subversive of our hopes, the thought naturally occurring that so childish and trifling a creature has no claim on an enduring existence. But the argument is good, notwithstanding. Look at it fairly. Undoubtedly, man *is* the being whom we have represented. He is a compound of vices and puerilities which are calculated to excite, not only astonishment, but painful contempt. Nor can any be excepted from the charge. The best man who treads the earth is, to his dying day, the wretched slave, not, indeed, of the grosser forms of criminality, but of a low, grovelling nature, the consciousness of which fills him with an oppressive sense of littleness, a painful suspicion that with all his nobler feelings and aspirations, he is a *vulgar creature*, unworthy of any special favors beyond a short earthly pilgrimage. Yet, on the other hand, he cannot, in his better moods, persuade himself, that the aspirations spoken of mean *nothing*. He cannot resist the belief that he possesses what the old Roman philosopher called *quiddam divinum*, — a certain divine nobility, that fits him for, as well as entitles him to expect, a protracted existence. How shall we harmonize this seeming contradiction, — this blending in the same subject of light and darkness, the immensely great and almost infinitesimally small, — the angel and ape. The only fair solution is, that we are in a state of imperfect development. The human soul is advancing to a higher plane, and death is the golden gateway through which she must pass. It seems a necessity, in the government of the all-wise and benevolent Creator, that a period should arrive

when her good shall unfold into a purer, greater good; and what is absurd and evil pass away, like the offensive crudity of a young fruit, when, by expansion and growth, it has attained its luscious ripeness. Let us accept with joy and thankfulness the exposition of the apostle, given with all that lyric grandeur which characterized this first of human writers, when under the spell of some commanding thought: "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God: for the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope: for the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

Let me, in conclusion, seriously exhort you to make conscience of your thoughts. There are those who would persuade us, though we doubt whether they have succeeded in persuading themselves, that the Creator of all worlds will never stoop so far as to notice, either for good or evil, the working of men's minds. As well may they say that he is too exalted to notice this muddy little planet at all. *We* are better instructed. We know that he stoops to objects of the smallest dimensions, and which might escape the notice of an imperfect being. He who spreads out the heavens, binds the sweet influences of Pleiades, and can loose the bands of Orion, who brings forth Mazzaroth in his season, and guides Arcturus with his sons, fixes with like precision the atom in the sunbeam, counts the drops of the ocean, and the grains of sand on its shore. And will he scorn to exercise

jurisdiction over his finest workmanship? O man, man! that soul of thine is worth more than all the worlds in the universe: it is a *wonder!* We have called it God's workmanship, but untruly: it is *God's breath*, — an emanation from the Fountain of all light, purity, and blessedness; more beautiful in his eyes, an object of greater interest, because he sees in it more of himself, than sun, moon, stars, and all the galaxy of heaven. It is his image, his living reflection, so resembling him that the Eternal Son, in whom all the Father shines, freely, joyfully, without consciousness of any degradation, became its near kinsman, and died for it. And is its soiled purity such a trifle in the divine estimation? Do not think it. The day is approaching when of all the vain counsels of the heart you will be required to give an account. In entertaining them, you are cherishing *serpents* in your bosom, which will requite you with deadly wounds!

In order to repel their invasions, be impressed with a serious apprehension of the omnipresence of the Lord. Ever remember that his all-seeing eye is upon you, and be warned by it to unceasing vigilance and circumspection.

Watch against every occasion of vain thoughts; all amusements, employments, company, pictures, books, that have a tendency to suggest them.

Set a watch over your senses. Make a solemn covenant with your eyes and ears; for, usually, they are the avenues through which the unclean thing obtains entrance.

Finally, commit your ways to the Lord, and your thoughts shall be established.

Halting in Religion.

XI.

HALTING IN RELIGION.

1 *Kings* 18: 21. How long halt ye between two opinions?

HESE words are part of the address of the Prophet Elijah to his idolatrous countrymen immediately before the experiment which issued so fatally to the priests of Baal. The Israelites had for many ages been favored with the knowledge of the true and living Jehovah, while the nations around them were plunged in the most debasing idolatry. God had recorded his name in the midst of them, and both by works and word had given most illustrious exhibitions of his character. Strange, however, as it may seem to those who deny the native corruption, and proneness to evil of the human heart, they, in a very early stage of their history, deserted his service and joined with the miserable Pagans, whom they had been taught to pity in bowing before the shrine of demons. Yet we are not to suppose that in these cases the true God was entirely discarded. Few ventured as far as this. The great body of the people continued to honor him with a partial recognition, and allotted him a *certain proportion* of religious worship. In this arrangement there was nothing at variance with the system of

Paganism. Being based on the idea of innumerable gods, equal and independent, it could have no objection that its votary be sometimes found at the altar of Baal, sometimes at the temple of the God of Israel. But it *was* inconsistent with the service due to him who sat enthroned on the holy hill of Zion. Having rescued his covenant people from Egyptian bondage by an outstretched arm, and organized them under the happiest auspices into a nation, he announced the first principle of their government in these memorable words: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Jehovah;" and threatened the most terrible penalties against those who would give the least part of his glory to another. The conduct of the Israelites, then, independent of its criminality, was the most foolish and inconsistent that can well be imagined. They endeavored to reconcile what, in the nature of things, could not be reconciled, the worship of the *one only God* with that of *many*, indulging the fantastic idea that by this means they might secure the favor and disarm the enmity of all.

In the words of our text the prophet Elijah rebukes this stupid infatuation. He informs his hearers that the God of Israel required their *whole* service; that he would admit no compromise or accommodation; and that, rather than persist in the insulting course they had adopted, it was better for them *entirely* to reject him and surrender themselves without reserve to all the abominations of heathenism. The expression used is remarkably significant, — being taken from the feeble and ineffectual movements of a paralytic, or one maimed in his limbs, who drags

himself along with great pain, and to little purpose. "How long halt," or, in other words, *limp*, "ye between two opinions."

I propose to attack from these words this limping, — that neutrality and indecision in religion which so extensively prevail among hearers of the gospel. So wide, indeed, is its prevalence, that we may pronounce it the rock on which a decided *majority* wreck their immortal souls. It has pleased a benignant Providence to favor our day and land with happy exemption from atheism and speculative infidelity. Kings of the earth no longer set themselves, or rulers take counsel together against the Lord's Anointed. We no longer hide our heads in corners when we meet together in the name of Christ. We assemble in the face of day. Christian churches shoot their tall spires in the skies. The Sanhedrim has lost its authority; the persecuting Cæsars are clods of the valley. Christianity, in a word, has become the object of *respect*, and the assent to its doctrines is the thing of course expected from all who have our esteem and confidence. Yet that all are not Christians is a truth too manifest to admit of denial. How comes this, we are naturally disposed to ask? How shall we account for the singular fact that persons respect, venerate, eulogize the religion of the Bible, without giving any evidence of really and practically adopting it? Alas, it is one of those many inconsistencies into which unhappy man seems doomed to fall, and which admits no other explanation than the broad scriptural proposition, "The carnal mind is enmity against God."

The fact need not be concealed, and cannot, that the most of men are content with walking half-way between God and the devil, — afraid of leaning too far toward either. On the one hand, they see an intrinsic excellence and reasonableness in religion; their understandings tell them that it is right, that its laws, its rewards, its punishments, are all admirably proper; its noble and lovely form pleasingly affects their imagination. But, on the other, they find attractions in the pleasures of sin and the world, which counterbalance every good impression. Hence their disposition to compromise the matter. They will not cast off the service of God, but they do not come up to the great rule of "loving him with all the heart." There is not one spark of life or energy in their religion. It produces no high joys, no deep sorrows, no definite course of conduct. They will not be the professed slaves and drudges of sin, working all iniquity with greediness; but they have no objection to gratify occasionally an unlawful lust. They will keep clear of flagrant enormities from compliment to God; but sins, less presumptuous, they commit out of indulgence to themselves. They are so far *for* religion that they attend with commendable punctuality its public institutions and ordinances. But here they stop, forgetting the more private, and paying no regard to the devotion of the heart. They approve the various benevolent projects of the day, the cause of Sabbath schools and Bible societies, of domestic and foreign missions. But they seldom *give*, and when they do, the amount shows that their souls are pent up in their money-bags. They profess

to know, and are sometimes heard to exclaim, in a sentimental way, that here "they have no continuing city;" "that strait is the gate," etc.; but they walk in the smooth-beaten track which the multitude tread, are always in the fashion, consult their own ease and pleasure, fear reproach, are impatient of reproof, self-willed, delighting in the praise of men rather than the praise of God.

> "They see the right, and they approve it too;
> Perceive the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue."

There are seasons, however, in their life, when the contest between light and darkness in their soul seems to promise a more happy issue, and when the religious attraction gains a temporary ascendency. They hear an impressive sermon; and truth, like a barbed arrow, pierces their heart, awakening trains of deep and painful reflection. Or they are roused from their lethargy by the death of a friend,—a beloved parent, for instance. While they stand before the cold remains of her, who was dearer to them than any other earthly object, they feel how poor is that riches which can boast no inheritance in the skies. A solemn purpose is formed of commencing in good earnest the Christian pilgrimage. They converse with pious friends; are assiduous in their attendance at the prayer-meeting; under the influence of their chastened and purified feelings, unfold many lovely qualities of heart which surprise their most intimate acquaintance; and the church is already rejoicing in the prospect of clasping to her parental bosom new trophies of redeeming grace. But, be-

fore a very few weeks have passed away, the tear is dried, the prayer forgotten, and they have fallen back into a deeper torpor than that from which they were awakened. A little worldly society, a little temptation, a little profane raillery from their companions, made them dismiss all their resolutions and perjure themselves before God. Perhaps their devotional paroxysm was occasioned by a fit of sickness. As their fever rose and fell, so did the fervors of their religion. Their piety was regulated by the pulse. When the physician reported one hundred and twenty strokes in a minute, God was a most glorious Being, eternity an awful thought, and preparation for it the only proper business of life. When down to seventy, a considerable spice of enthusiasm was found in their former sentiments, and they could look at certain subjects with a much more calm philosophy. Truly, a sublime philosophy, which depends on a good digestion, and which an attack of headache or colic can at any time throw into delirium tremens!

In such a wretched halting between two opinions, do thousands pass their lives; and they endeavor to excuse this ignoble state of mind by two considerations.

The first is, that as all salvation is of grace, and as the Author of it is the most merciful of beings, a little religion will go a great way with a judge so inclined to be favorable. Hence, they feel at liberty to let the garment of Christianity sit loose on them, content with paying so much obedience as will allow him to exercise the needed indulgence, without

grossly outraging his justice and moral rectitude. They ask, with some little triumph, whether the design of Christ's advent into the world was not to atone for sin and defects; to compensate for what we have not done, by what he himself hath done; to cover our infirmities and nakedness with the robe of his merit? I entertain not a doubt, that this is a favorite speculation of all whom I am now describing. They do make the Redeemer and his work a minister to licentiousness; they do continue in sin, that grace may abound,—and from the very blessed fact, which should kindle a burning ardor in the service of their God and Saviour, they take occasion to stand aloof, or, at least, to halt between two opinions.

Another flattering unction they lay to their soul is the notion, that even if an earnest and decided religion *be* necessary, yet there will be full opportunity for it at a future period. Conscience will not always permit them to rest in the former consideration. It tells them, in a voice of thunder, that nothing short of supreme affection to the God of life and redemption, a confirmed hatred to all the ways of sin, will secure an interest in the Redeemer's merit; and now the policy of indefinite or definite postponement is resorted to. If asked on what grounds they defer an event so essential to their eternal welfare, they are at no loss for answers. Some pressing worldly embarrassment is to be removed, some business to be adjusted, a certain age to be reached. Nay, I personally know an individual who, being questioned why he did not unite himself with the church of

Christ, answered that he was ready for the important step three years previous, but that he had been waiting (kind husband as he was) for the company of his wife! At other times, the plea of deliberation is used. They exhibit themselves in the dignified attitude of *reflecting*, *calculating*, *seeking light*, — an excuse sometimes, indeed, perfectly valid, but much more frequently a mere pretext for indulging the most criminal supineness and indifference. Some are engaged, they tell us, in preparing for discipleship by a course of gradual reformation. They have not, as yet, obtained deliverance from a particular passion, or vice of temper, which gives them much uneasiness and would not be reputable in a Christian professor. They are not sure that they could resist the temptation to drink a little too deeply, if thrown into certain company and situations; or they are subject to violent gusts of anger, during which they act more like madmen, than reasonable creatures. They are sorry to add, that the habit of profaneness is not entirely eradicated. These things they hope to correct in due time, and then shall they join hands with the people of the Redeemer. Plausible language, and quite agreeable to flesh and blood. To break off ungodliness by a violent wrench, and *at once*, costs too much; they cannot think of it. They know that they have no right to continue in the violation of any one of Heaven's edicts a single hour, and that the very thought of so doing is a mockery of the Divine Being. But they are determined to make the trial; they resolve on getting better by degrees, to hate the ways of holiness a little

less, and to love the paths of sin a little less, from month to month, or, at least, from year to year; and they doubt not, that, before leaving the world, if they live long enough, they will prove excellent Christians. Nothing can be more convenient than such a scheme. It soothes the mind in its guilty terrors. It presents the *prospect* of repenting and reforming. It takes up the *purpose*, and the poor deceived man is habitually violating the most solemn commands of his God, hardening his conscience, and strengthening every sinful principle of his heart, while gayly flattering himself that the experiment of gradual improvement is in the full tide of successful operation.

Having delineated the character of those described in the text, I proceed to expostulate with them, and convince them, if possible, of their guilt and folly. I say, if possible, — for if the heart be unaffected, vain are appeals to the understanding; and this is the true reason why the gospel minister so often labors in vain, and spends his strength for nought. Were you as willing as you are able to discuss the question of duty, the preacher would be saved many long speeches, and yourselves many tedious hours in listening to him.

I observe, in the first place, that the course of conduct described is the most *unreasonable* that can be imagined. The great distinction between a wise man and a fool is, that the former, after a careful deliberation, forms his *maxims*, to which under the conviction of their truth he resolutely adheres. His decisions are fixed, and become the standard and rule of his conduct. The fool, on the other hand,

rests content on every subject with vague impressions, and has *no maxims*, unless we honor with that name the thousand prejudices he has received from education or accident. He is, therefore, the sport of every contingency. He is guilty of innumerable inconsistencies every hour, and to him may be applied the old adage concerning death, — "Nothing is certain but its uncertainty." That *he* should adopt a system of opinions by halves is not surprising. He is a *fool;* and the character of a fool is that he holds conclusions while denying the premises, and holds the premises while denying the conclusion. From a wise man, better things are expected. We require him to be *consistent.* We require that whatever sentiments he adopts, he will defend in all their bearings, and that he will practically abide by their results. However great, or however little may be their solidity, we expect that *he*, at least, will feel confidence in them, and be willing to stake his happiness and hopes upon their truth. Such is the reasonable man in common life, and such, let me say, is the reasonable man in religion. He is one who, scorning the trammels and swaddling-bands of education, aspires to study for himself the great question of obligation, and discover what relations exist between him and his Creator. After due examination he adopts conclusions. Altogether unlike the wretched sophists, who, glorying in their shame, count it the highest honor of human nature to be enveloped in universal scepticism, he considers *truth*, — *knowledge*, as the object of all his researches, and the attainment of which can only justify his toil. He therefore, as I

have said, adopts conclusions; and, not stopping here, unites them into a code of practical principles which give a complete tone to his whole future life and conduct. For example, if, after an honest scrutiny into the evidences of a Supreme Being, he brings himself to believe (pardon me the supposition that a reasonable man can bring himself to believe), that there is no God, he at once rejects him, and puts down without ceremony the rising sentimentalities of early education. If, on the contrary, he is convinced of the existence of a great First Cause, he acknowledges it, and acts upon it. If, after an examination of the authenticity and truth of the gospel, he discovers it to be the invention of men, no Bible-hankerings will prevent him from thinking so; and, suiting his conduct to the thought, he will at once cast it forth from his heart, his family, his closet, and take reason as the only guide of his pilgrimage through life. Does he find it, on the contrary, to justify its high pretensions, he believes it. Yes, he believes it in the richest meaning of the word. He acquiesces in all its doctrines, precepts, penalties, and rewards. He takes it as a light to his feet, and a lamp to his path. He exclaims, "Oh, how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day;" "mine eyes prevent the night-watches that I may meditate on thy word."

If there be any justice in these remarks, I would ask *how*, without a gross abuse of language, we can honor the persons described in the text, with the name of reasonable creatures? The reasonable man is one who forms on every important subject decided

opinions. These have no opinions, — on themes, too, of absorbing interest. The reasonable man carries out his belief into appropriate, consistent practice. These are halting between two plans of conduct, not only at variance with each other, but as opposite as light and darkness: like a stupid mariner, who, unwilling for some reason to leave his anchorage ground, holds on to his moorings, while at the same time, desirous of gaining his destined port, he spreads all his canvas to the breeze. Let me address myself for a moment to them in friendly expostulation. You believe that there is a God. Why do you not serve him? You believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Why, then, do you not make them the supreme rule of your conduct? You are there informed of your miserable condition by nature; and yet the cry has never been heard to escape your lips, "What shall I do to be saved?" You are there made acquainted with Christ and the terms on which his redemption is applied; and yet you have never believed on his name, nor repented towards God. The same with all the moral truths of religion. You believe them all without exception, and yet continually belie them by your life and conduct. Certainly the warmest partiality must concede that you are acting most unreasonably; and were it the same in the things of this world, you would be hooted at as fools and idiots. But there, alas, you are as wise as the wisest! Were a man to offer you what had every appearance of a splendid bargain, you might pause for a moment; but you would not pause long; the decision would *soon* be made; or if the offerer,

wearied with your delays, transferred his overture to another, how would you curse your unreasonableness in neglecting so excellent an opportunity of improving your condition! And yet, when God is proffering all the riches of heaven and glory, you stand aloof, fluctuating, undecided, though you know not what a day or an hour may bring forth.

Secondly. This course of conduct is *unprofitable*. If any good effects with respect to a person's *happiness* resulted from neutrality in religion, though they would not take away guilt, they might be brought forward as a plea of extenuation. But there are none. Its only tendency is to limit and curtail human enjoyment. Religion, like the fiery pillar which conducted Israel to the promised land, has its bright and its dark side,—I mean its pleasures and its pains. The service of sin has its *lights*, and shadows also. That there is *pleasure* in sin cannot be denied, however we may question its solidity and duration. There *is* pleasure in forgetting the Being to whom we must give an account, and in living far from his presence. There *is* pleasure in the cup of intemperance, however it may turn to bitterness in the end. There *is* pleasure, to men of a certain complexion, in low and licentious company, in degrading sensual gratification. There *is* pleasure in gambling, in violating the Sabbath, in venting malevolent passions, in laughing at all that good men call venerable and holy. I say not that the enjoyment is of a very elevated nature, or that no bitter recompense is in store. Hell and the burning wrath of God are a tremendous drawback on such pleasure. Pleasure, however, it is;

and they who wallow in open vice are therefore not without their remuneration. Now the striking peculiarity in the case of those under our review is, that they contrive to lose the satisfactions both of *religion and sin at the same time*. They know little of the Christian's joys, but experience many of his sorrows and privations. They scarcely taste the pleasures of ungodliness, for they dare not; and yet feel its envenomed sting. Universal observation proves this, and leaves no room to doubt that a partial religion makes a man miserable rather than happy. By it he is kept back from many indulgences, which, though unlawful, are real sources of enjoyment; yet never attains that true peace, those prelibations of celestial felicity which God gives as a compensation to those who love him. By it he is goaded to the performance of an insipid round of outward observances, unacceptable to God, and wearying to himself. In a word, he forfeits the Devil's pay, though he in reality serves him as diligently as ever. He has religion enough to feel *woe-begone* and *anxious* in every serious conjuncture of life, but not enough to inspire him with Christian vigor and fortitude. He has enough to make his strong frame shiver with agony in the prospect of death, but not enough to put into his lips the believer's triumphal song, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?" His religion will not let him enjoy the world, and the world will not let him enjoy God; so that he has no peace in either. The reckless and abandoned ruffian has, in point of happiness, a decided advantage over him. The former, confining

himself to one source of pleasure, low and degraded though it be, gains *something*. This one, grasping two incompatible goods, *loses both*. Rest assured that never will the comforts of the Holy Ghost be poured into our hearts, never will our piety become a living fount of joy, until we become not almost but altogether Christians.

Thirdly. The conduct referred to is *servile and unmanly*. It is the character of a man, that is, of one who proves his right to the name by the possession of a manly spirit, that when he sees an object before him which it is desirable to obtain, no difficulties nor sacrifices will deter him from the pursuit. On the same principle, we despise the coward, who can betray a noble cause through fear of certain dangers and personal inconveniences. Such is the spirit evinced by those whose criminality we are exposing. They believe that the unreserved practice of religion is right and proper; they will even concede, in their hours of calmer reflection, that it is the one thing needful; but they shrink from the privations it may cost. They shudder at the thought of sacrificing certain indulgences and amusements, of being obliged to walk circumspectly, of losing caste among their gay companions. What adds to the unmanliness is their still persisting in attentions to the object of their apprehension. They are evidently afraid of being too intimate, and as evidently afraid of being too far distant. Did their fears induce them to neglect it *altogether*, this would be comparatively playing the hero; but to coquet with it, to treat it in this flirting, ambiguous manner, deserves no

other name than superlative treachery and cowardice. How do we despise a man of whom we hear, that he makes it his business to attend the levees of two hostile political leaders, fawning equally on both, and anxiously concealing from the one his attentions to the other. Such is the respect many pay to religion, — the respect of a slave, — outward, cringing, hypocritical, and self-contradictory. There sits the slave, — the poor, crouching, shuffling, double-dealer with his God. His whole life is spent in going two ways, one step forward, and one step backward. He is continually building up with the one hand, and, as if frightened at his own work, pulling down with the other. He loves sin, and hates it; he loves God, and flees from him; he would, and he *would not*. Must not a mean and slavish spirit be at the bottom of a character like this?

Fourthly. It is entirely *inexcusable*. If the question whether it was our duty to enter on a life of piety was difficult to answer, some hesitation might be allowed. But none is more easy. The light of nature itself decides it; beside which, we are furnished with an ample and lucid revelation. Religion, consisting in the love and fear of God, evincing itself by universal obedience, we are distinctly told is "the one thing needful." The issue of a contrary course is painted in the most awful colors, and the reward of holiness in language the most stirring and delightful; there is, therefore, no hard problem to solve. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth; — the word of faith which we preach." To continue, then, in suspense for a moment is without excuse.

Were there many paths to life, an interval of delay might be demanded to ascertain which should be preferred. But as there is only one; as we know there is but one, why waste precious time in idling round the gate, when everything around us and within us urges to decisive action?

The inexcusableness of such conduct appears not only from the clearness with which the conditions of salvation are exhibited, but from their *ease and lightness*. What doth the Lord thy God require of thee? Must you forsake your pleasant home, and travel to the ends of the earth in search of something rare and difficult to be obtained? Must you offer up thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil? Must you sacrifice the dearest comforts of life, your first-born for your transgression, and the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul? Must you retire to a desert, live on roots and water, and dig your own grave in the sand? None of these things. You are not required to sacrifice one human affection or sympathy. The unnatural and austere morality, which imposes such self-crucifixion, has no warrant from Scripture, which exhorts us to "eat our bread with joy." The goodness of God has filled the world with a variety of pleasing objects, all of which have a claim on our attachment. They administer the means of satisfaction and comfort to soften our passage through this state of trial. Many of them, by their order and brilliancy, attract the warmest admiration, and excite in the cultivated mind emotions of beauty or sublimity which an angel might acknowledge without a blush. All demanded of us

is, that every affection, directed to transitory objects, be subordinate to the love of Him who is the source of all excellence and felicity. God requires us to give him the first place in our regard, that is all; to show ourselves, in all conjunctures, on his side; to spend our property, after satisfying our necessary wants, in promoting his kingdom, to keep his Holy Sabbath, to maintain secret, private, and family devotion, and to live as those who have their conversation in heaven. Let any man in this assembly give a good, substantial reason why he hesitates an instant in commencing a life like this, — a life so excellent, so happy, so divine, that in comparison with it no other deserves the name. Could heaven be more cheaply won?

Lastly. It is *self-deceiving and self-destructive.* A little religion, like a little learning, is a dangerous thing. It elates with pride, lulls the conscience of its possessor into a fatal slumber, and encourages him to say "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Hence the old, and, in some respects, true observation, though liable to be misunderstood, that the gross and scandalous evil-doer is nearer the kingdom of heaven, than the decent, self-righteous Pharisee who maintains the form of godliness without the power. The former has no pretensions to piety, and is prepared, therefore, to see his wretchedness. The latter, though equally destitute of true love to God, still *professes attachment*, and, resting on this, he hardens himself against every attempt to convince him that he is poor and wretched, miserable, blind, and naked.

It is true, the number is very small of such persons. There are few of our limping religionists who can rid themselves of terrible misgivings that all is not right; for, as I have already observed, a partial religion is, in general, a source of more uneasiness than enjoyment. Yet its votaries contrive to blunt the keen edge of their fears by some course of thought like the following:—Heaven, they imagine to be, an extensive and magnificent mansion, prepared for a multitude whom no man can number, and offered to mankind on certain conditions. Now, when they look through the world, they discover so few conforming to the terms, in their spirituality and rigor, that an abatement seems absolutely necessary in order to secure a *quorum*. God must adopt the policy of the proprietors of our public vehicles in a time of competition, who, to avoid the disgrace of running empty, are fain to put up with half-price; and, if so, who have a better right than they to claim the benefit of the arrangement? They cannot expect indeed a high place in the kingdom of heaven. But, good, humble creatures, they do not ask it; they are not ambitious. Little desirous of any intimate acquaintance with God in the present life, they are not greatly troubled with the thought of standing apart from him in the next. A snug corner of paradise, be it ever so distant and out of sight, will satisfy their highest wishes. Thus they live, thus they die, and discover not their error but by the light of the inextinguishable flame.

We conclude with a few reflections.

First. How fatally ignorant are many of their

true character in the sight of God. We would not indulge in uncharitable judgment, remembering that with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again; but the fact is too notorious, that much of the Christianity we see around us falls exceedingly short of what its great Author requires. How, otherwise, can we explain that attachment to the world, that thirst for riches, that levity of deportment, that fondness for giddy pastimes and amusements, which universally prevail? Are these symptoms of a disposition to make religion and the service of God *our chief* joy? Rather do they not strikingly prove that even on the most favorable supposition our hearts are divided between him and idols?

Secondly. We see the fact explained, that many who begin well the Christian course come short of the Christian reward. They stop in the midst of their career. Having, under the common operations of the Spirit of God, become convinced of their sin and misery, they were made to cry with the importunity of despair, "What shall I do to be saved?" Discovering the plan of redemption by Jesus Christ, they admired its glorious suitableness to their condition, and exclaimed, with an honest fervor, "My Lord, and my God." So far, all was well. But here they rested. They forgot that the most essential part of true religion is self-dedication to God; that he only is accepted who yields unlimited obedience to his laws; and that he who makes one reserve stops short of the gate of immortality. Thus, terminating their journey heavenward, they have at last found themselves excluded, and their lofty hopes have vanished

into vapor before the tremendous sentence: "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

I conclude, with affectionately exhorting you to make thorough work of your religion. It is an eternal truth, that, if Christianity be worth *anything*, it is worth *everything;* if it deserves thinking about *at all*, it deserves thinking about almost to the exclusion of every other subject. You cannot, in this important matter, be too diligent, too decided. Many have had reason to lament their indolence, but none, who are now enjoying the heavenly crown, complain that they ran with too much eagerness the race set before them. And let us remember that time is short. Let us make the most of it, by pressing into it as much virtue and religion as we can. The flower of the field must scatter its odors to-day; to-morrow it is gone. Live not one hour in vain. Whatever opportunity of serving God you have, seize it with avidity; whatever useful undertaking you may have meditated, make haste to execute; for soon must you lie down in the dust, and the eye shall seek you in the morning, but you shall not be. Thus shall you secure a peace which will sustain you in all life's trying vicissitudes, and when you fall asleep (the servant of Christ never dies), angelic whispers shall be heard around your bed, lulling your wearied, but happy spirit in strains like this: —

"Servant of God, well done;
Thy glorious warfare's past,
The battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crowned at last."

The Two Truths.

XII.

THE TWO TRUTHS.

John 3 : 36. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

IT is not difficult to assign the reason why our religion — so unaccommodating and in almost every sense unpopular, as well on account of the purity of its precepts as the awfulness of its sanctions — always has had and will have such devoted friends and advocates. The explanation is to be found in the deep, abiding conviction, planted by the Spirit of God in the soul which he is pleased to make the object of his teaching, that it is the only scheme which promises, on any solid grounds, deliverance from the evils that human nature principally dreads, and possession of the blessings it most of all desires. It satisfies, and it alone satisfies, the thoughtful spirit's longings for immortality. After making fair trial of other expedients, — all disappointing it, all ending in weariness and disgust, — it at last was directed, like Hagar, to this fountain in the desert, and has found refreshment. "He that believeth on the Son," says our text, "hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life."

Without entering into a minute exposition of the

words, which is entirely unnecessary, we propose to make them the basis of a few important reflections, which, if they do not excite interest and serious attention, the cause must lie in their unhappy presentation on the part of the speaker, or sad stupidity in you the hearers.

Our first observation is, that all men need some refuge from apprehensions of the future; some resource which may enable them to look forward with any kind of satisfaction to the unresolved problem, — what awaits them beyond the present. This need is the result of our constitutional ignorance and sinfulness; our ignorance preventing us from *seeing into* a future state, and our sinfulness damping what discoveries we may make, by a sense of guilt and a foreboding of future punishment. With regard to the former, it is universally acknowledged. It is very certain that we know little of hereafter, and the little we do know is by no means decidedly favorable to our wishes. The man who, unenlightened by Christianity, first dared to whisper the suggestion, that the grave is not the end of our career, that its prison-doors shall be opened, the prisoner burst his chains and soar to happier regions, — that man, I freely acknowledge, offered a sublime conjecture; and he was led to it, I concede, by many specious analogies and presumptions. He thought probably of the vicissitudes of the seasons, the change wrought in the chrysalis of insects, the spiritual nature of the soul, its indefinite capacity, its longings after immortality, the justice of the Almighty, and the voice of conscience, — all tending to invest with a shadowy proba-

bility the idea of future existence. But conjecture, in its highest degree of plausibility, is immensely removed from that certainty which on such a subject is necessary to give repose to the mind; and, accordingly, at this *very day*, the mere philosopher doubts of the immortality of the soul!

Thus man needs a resource against his ignorance, but much more against his conscious guilt. It is a sad reflection, that, if any light at all on the subject of hereafter beams on the child of nature, the greater part of it comes, not from the fountain of *light*, but *darkness*, — I mean from sin. Christ is the only credible teacher of immortality left to our desolate world; and our single comfort is that, when it denounces "tribulations," it, too, deals only in probabilities, though, it must be confessed, they are of the highest kind. Who that reflects on these things will hesitate to acknowledge that human nature has need of a resource, which may nerve it to look forward without shrinking at the possibilities of the future? Were the prospect only a dark one, a resource would be needed. But, merciful God! how worse it is than dark!

Secondly. Accordingly, we observe that the generality of men, in a greater or less degree, *feel this need*, and resort to some expedient or another against the fear of what follows after death. There is reason to think that no man, at least no man of ordinary cultivation, is perfectly asleep on this point. The fault of the majority is, not that they despise the blessedness of another world, for this is impossible; but they seek where they cannot find it, or impose

upon themselves by various modes of thinking, which as effectually deprive them of this blessedness as if they did not seek at all. Who would not be saved? Who would not give all the world contains for a tranquillizing assurance that when the soul parts from its clay tenement the bitterness of death is forever passed, and will be succeeded by a joyful morning? Go through the world with this interrogatory. Ask the drunkard, reeling from his midnight orgies; ask the seducer of innocence, the midnight assassin, the ravager of kingdoms. The deadly pallor with which the very suggestion overspreads their countenances sufficiently evinces that, whatever be the certain tendencies of their *conduct*, damnation is not in any of their calculations. Hence, as no nation is to be found without its religious creed, so there is scarcely an individual who has not provided a system of opinions in which he may find shelter from the fears of an unknown, dark futurity. These systems vary with the temperament, and undergo innumerable modifications from circumstances, such as age, company, course of reading, and education. The man of literary accomplishments has his; the vulgar have theirs; but all proceed from the same source, and have the same end in view.

Thirdly. We now proceed to observe that, apart from the revelation of the blessed gospel, they are all inefficient and utterly vain. When we say this, we hazard no doubtful proposition. It is not denied that some have been attended with partial success; that the bloody rites of Paganism, for instance, have frequently armed their votaries against the terrors of

dissolution; and the deluded follower of the Arabian impostor has found in the unholy dogmas of his sensual creed a courage which enabled him to bear up not only against life's sorest evils, but the bitter pangs of death, in the hope of immortality. What we contend for is the entire inadequacy of all the devices sought out and embraced by human ingenuity to tranquillize a reflecting mind. Go where we will, if we go not to Christ, we have neither peace to the conscience, nor rest to the heart.

Take a few examples. Shall we go to *atheism?* — The speaker's heart would die within him, could he imagine that there was one within reach of his voice disposed to hesitate as to the answer. Atheism is the madness of human nature. He who can take complacency in the idea of standing naked in a fatherless world; in the idea that virtue and crime, judgment and retribution, death and the life beyond it, are high-sounding words of emptiness, — only proves that there are no assignable limits to the mind's power of self-abasement. And what does he gain? What tempts him to cut away with ruthless hand everything in human belief that is dignifying and dear to a pure heart? He thinks, doubtless, that his scheme puts an eternal extinguisher on those fears of hereafter which so often interrupt his pleasures, and awaken him at the midnight hour. "No God! — then no life to come: — then let me eat and drink, for to-morrow I die." But does he reason well, even on his own horrible principles? Examine this point for a moment. It is certain that we exist *at present*, whatever becomes of us in the future;

that we feel; that we often terribly suffer. How happens this? The atheist, of course, replies, by *chance:* all things are in a continual flow, and among the endless vicissitudes and revolutions that have been taking place, *we* have sprung up in our turn; — it being as likely that such a modification of matter as man should happen to exist as any other modification. But now comes a question which probably did not occur to him while constructing his ingenious argument: whether, on the same notable principle of chance, my existence *may not be protracted* beyond the change that takes place at death? What is to insure me against undergoing a revolution like that experienced by many animals, who die in winter and revive in spring? I live at present; may I *not live hereafter?* I suffer now; may I not suffer hereafter? and what, in the doctrine of chance, assures me that this suffering shall not be a thousand fold greater than in existing circumstances? Such is the system of the unhappy atheist. While it tears away every consolation in the hour of trial, everything soothing to a good man's soul, every motive to virtue, it, at the same moment, whispers in the ear of its votary that his worst apprehensions may be realized to the full. Oh, thou haggard monster, whom even hell disowns, — wherever we seek relief, we seek it not in thee!

Shall we go to *deism*, — that more common form of infidelity, which, rejecting the Christian revelation, but borrowing from the treasures it affects to despise, acknowledges the existence of an almighty First Cause; his inspection over the conduct of his

creatures, and a future state of punishment and reward? Though there is something, in this system, out of sight, more noble than can be found in the dismal slough of atheism, truth compels us to say that there is nothing more unsatisfying. What, in the first place, is to assure the deist that the Bible *is not*, as it professes to be, *the unerring word of God*, and that its solemn denunciations are not the genuine expressions of the divine anger against sin? He may dispute the sufficiency of its evidence, and infer, from what he thinks a comprehensive view of the whole subject, that *probably* it is not of celestial origin. But he dare go no further. Here he must stick. After all, Jesus Christ may be no impostor, his doctrine no delusion, Tophet no fable; and what is the position of the deist then, habitual despiser as he is of the blood of God's everlasting covenant? But passing this, and allowing him to have satisfied himself that the gospel is a falsehood, the query now arises, where else shall he go? What doctrine will give him that repose which the words of Christ fail to impart? Let him go to one portion of the globe, and he will see unnumbered multitudes worshipping before the shrine of uncleanness, or precipitating themselves beneath the wheels of an idol's car. In another direction, a father is taking his little one from the bosom of its mother, and enclosing it in the burning arms of Moloch. In another, he sees a whole nation offering up its prayers to a butterfly. Or, sick of human folly, will he look out on beautiful nature, and, from the contemplation of her, evolve a system of beliefs which shall not be altogether unworthy of a

rational being? But, when he fairly girds himself to this task, he soon finds that he has entered on a dark and dreary path. The first object of his anxiety will be, of course, to ascertain the intentions and temper of the Deity. When, for this purpose, he surveys his actual ways and works, he is astounded at finding that the unequivocal proofs of his perfect goodness are enclosed within a very narrow compass. He sees much good in the world,—does he not? Ay! But does he not see *much evil?* Does he not find a character of misfortune clearly impressed on his own nature, in all stages of his progress from the cradle to the grave, affording sad omen of what may, perhaps, take place hereafter. Besides, when he attends to the operations of his own mind, he discovers there a profound conviction that he is under the just displeasure of the Lord of all worlds; and when he looks abroad, he sees, in the trembling anxiety of all nations to propitiate their deities by blood, a proof that this consciousness is *universal*, and, therefore, has some foundation in truth; for there is no such a thing as an universal error.

There is a circumstance, deserving notice, which must give a terrible increase to his forebodings that it may not be well with him. Had his Maker any favorable intentions, is it not likely that some pre-intimation would be given of them,—would be given in the way of taking him out of the world? We can hardly suppose that a monarch would order one of his subjects to be forced from his bed at midnight, violently, with many accompaniments of pain and disgrace, unless to inflict some terrible punishment.

Certainly, the subject would feel little hope that these were stepping-stones to a high place in his Master's favor. Apply this analogy to death. How are we taken out of the world? Are we not *torn* from it, just as a criminal is torn from his house to be immured in a dungeon? Our body is racked with pain; our spirits wither; we send forth strange sighs and groans; our friends weep over us, and, when the struggle is over, put on funeral garments, and receive the condolements of surviving friends. Everything bears witness that death is not understood by the unsophisticated human heart to be the passage of a king's son up to his father's house. Would it not rather seem as if it were a prelude to something more dreadful than itself? Believe me, you who go to infidelity, go to learn in a gloomy school. She is a sufficiently pleasant companion, no doubt, to thoughtless and giddy youth, caracoling along the broad highway of life, intent only on the gratification of the present hour. Many are the quirks and jeers at the moroseness of the bigot, which she can sport for his amusement, and, by her help, he can overcome many disagreeable compunctions which stand in the way of forbidden pleasure. But *woe* to him who arrives at the end of his course, and has no other guide! Looking down the dismal steep, she turns pale, and faints, and dies; or, suddenly transformed into a demon, triumphs in the misery of her besotted dupe, and with her own hands precipitates him into the yawning gulf. "O my soul, come not into the secrets of infidelity!"

But we shall not any longer detain you from the

most important and delightful part of our subject. The text is not a negative proposition, blessed be God! It does not cast down, but *builds up*. It does not kill, but *makes alive;* and so makes alive, that its quickened ones shall live forever. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." To a few proofs and illustrations of this, your attention shall now be directed.

We say, then, in the first place, that Jesus Christ alone has the gift of eternal life, as he is the only effective teacher of it; the only Master who inculcated the doctrine upon his disciples, and made its absolute, undoubted certainty the corner-stone of his whole system. The idea of immortality undoubtedly existed long before his advent; but he alone brought it down from the clouds of doubt, to that *sober certainty*, which fitted it to be practically influential, and to mingle itself with the every-day feelings and calculations of men. Mark his habitual language. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word hath eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." "Verily, verily, the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Who dared, besides the Man of Galilee, to talk in a strain like this? You see nothing dark or perplexing in the language: it is the Minister of Heaven who speaks, — one, who has himself come from the celestial cabinet which he represents, and with his own eyes has seen the fair mansions which are preparing for the heirs of immortality. I speak not at present, at least directly,

of the truth of this statement. Whether Jesus is, in these respects, what he professes to be, is a distinct consideration. We only say, that a prophet of immortality cannot be asked to give a better account of the way in which he received his instructions. Had he reasoned like the sages of the schools, he might have obtained his share of disciples, and his system taken its place among the otherwise conjectures of the age; but, in this case, would have been entirely destitute of that *certainty*, which has made it supersede every other, and be acknowledged by all civilized humanity, from the rising to the setting sun, man's best blessing and surest guide.

Hear, also, the language of the apostle: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And who dared to talk thus; who dared to say, "we know," but the disciples of this Master? There is something exceedingly delightful in all this, — in teachings so direct, so unqualified, and fearless, on such a subject; especially, when we contrast them with the timid doubt that is found everywhere else. For we naturally ask, how *could* this teacher speak with such assurance of manner, and inspire his scholars with such confidence of belief, unless he derived his knowledge from an authentic source?

And here is a most powerful additional consideration; that he tells us he received his certain knowledge, precisely *in the way* we judge he would have received it, — not from problematical and indeterminate reasonings, but from his eternal Father, who

sent him for the express purpose of announcing to a desponding race his merciful designs. This is enough. We have the will of him who made us, that we should have eternal life, expressed in the clearest terms, by an ambassador who could not mistake; for he was God's own eternal Son, who lay in his bosom, and shared in his most secret councils. "I came down from heaven," he says, "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me; and this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

We observe, secondly, that Jesus Christ has the gift of eternal life, inasmuch as he has revealed the only scheme of it consistent with the principles of divine government, and calculated to meet the difficulties which, to a reflecting mind, present themselves on this subject. Let us suppose that some wise man among the heathen had stepped forth before the public, and taught the doctrine with all the energy and directness of Christ himself. Suppose, still more, that he had assumed the prerogative of an ambassador from heaven, and that his hearers were quite willing to acknowledge him in this august character; we contend that not one of the numerous crowd, however fascinated by the charms of his eloquence, would retire, their understandings satisfied, and their hearts perfectly at ease. He has announced, indeed, with clearness the fact. But human nature wants a great deal more. We must know how a fact so anomalous in the government of God could take place; how it was rendered consistent with the

divine holiness to treat the sinner with impunity; how, in short, rebellion has stalked through one of the richest provinces of God's empire, and been rewarded for its misdeeds by the joys of immortality. Jesus Christ alone has expounded this fearful problem. Do you ask where? I answer, in the stable of Bethlehem; the garden of Gethsemane; the judgment-seat of Pilate; in the dying exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" You comprehend me. You understand that the complete and all-prevailing atonement he wrought out, as the substitute of guilty man, is that exposition. By answering all the designs of justice in punishing, it has removed the necessity of punishing, and given room for the exercise of benevolence to our perishing race. It has enabled the Divine Magistrate of the universe to be "just in justifying," and to receive the polluted rebel into the arms of his mercy without himself receiving a single stain. This was the grand point on which human nature desired to be enlightened; but desired in vain, till the day-spring from on high revealed the true sacrifice for sin, — a glorious, nay, Divine Mediator, who has levelled the mountains of separation between heaven and earth; harmonized mercy with moral government, and brought God and man together, never to be sundered more.

Thirdly. The miracles of Jesus prove that he has eternal life. If we have a teacher of high pretensions, blessed be God! he performed works while on the earth which leave no doubt on the mind whether he is able to make them good. We have not, indeed, enjoyed the opportunity of seeing them

personally. This is not necessary, nor would be proper. Not necessary; for the question is not, *who saw* them, but, *were they done?* And so long as belief in testimony keeps its place among the sources of knowledge, this question can receive but one answer. Nor proper; for where would be the propriety of making our earth the scene of constant miracle, that is to say, constant transgression of the laws by which it is governed? Is it not plain, that, if these laws be good and salutary, the *less they are violated the better*, and that it should take place only on those extraordinary emergencies when the divine purposes cannot be attained otherwise? And this has been the actual course of Providence in all ages. When the eternal Son appeared, there was a *plea* for the universe being put in a sort of temporary confusion; for it was the universe's high jubilee. But now that life and immortality have been brought to light and established on sufficient evidence, law has resumed the reins, and all things go on as from the foundation of the world. Yet it is to be held in devout and everlasting remembrance, that heaven and earth once bore witness to their incarnate God.

Here advert for a moment to the way in which the miracles of Jesus give testimony to his having eternal life for sinners. They do so by establishing the divinity of his mission, addressing themselves to two of the most fundamental laws of belief in the human mind: first, that none but the Author of nature can invert the regular course of physical events; and, secondly, that it is morally impossible, even for him, to invert it that sanction be given to *a*

falsehood. This was the Redeemer's own argument to the unbelieving Jews: "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me." But there is another, perhaps yet more convincing, light in which the subject may be viewed. Independently of the question where miracles originally came from, they are so many *immediate, practical illustrations of the worker's present ability* to do whatever He has promised. Many of us have read of the way in which the captain of a ship gained the confidence of a savage tribe, with whom he was trading, and who were not acquainted with the use of fire-arms. With the view of impressing upon them his immense power to do them good or harm, he raised his gun and shot a little bird perched on a twig at some considerable distance. This at once convinced them of his superiority and power to make good both threats and promises. Such is the operation of miracles I am now referring to. They satisfy the mind, not so much because they prove directly a divine mission, — though this they most triumphantly do, — as because they evince that he who can do *such works*, is able to accomplish all the wonders of grace that he has promised. Look at him while performing one of his mighty acts, — unstopping the ears of the deaf, or restoring the dead to life, — and imagine the reflections passing through the spectator's mind. Standing over a grave three days closed, he commands: "Lazarus, come forth!" It is

done. The sleeping prisoner awakes, comes forth in the garments of death, and presents himself to the astonished eyes of the multitude a living man! Imagine, now, that you hear from the author of this stupendous work, standing in the midst of the amazed throng: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Could there be a plea for doubt? Has he not, we may suppose one of his auditors exclaiming, this very moment done a work quite as stupendous, as impossible in the eye of man? True, I do not see him giving eternal life, for I cannot penetrate the veil that shrouds the future. But I see he *can give it*, — I see from the result of the present experiment that he most certainly has the keys of hell and of death. Yes, Lord Jesus, I see that thou art the resurrection and the life. How confirming to faith is this view of the subject! Our Saviour has already done great things in the earth; and he has done them that we "might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." He has done them to strengthen our faith in the far greater things he is yet to do, when, coming down from heaven in the clouds, he shall change the vile bodies of his saints and make them conformable to his own glorious body, "according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself."

I observe, fourthly, that facts of every-day occurrence prove that Jesus has eternal life. We do not see him call a Lazarus from his grave, or feed five thousand with two loaves and three fishes, or saying to the

winds and waves, "Peace, be still." But we can see sights nearly as extraordinary. We see his gospel triumphing over the tempestuous sea of the human heart, humbling its waves of pride and rebellion, softening its ferocious passions, elevating its grovelling desires; and, to crown all, pouring into it a heavenly consolation. We see it taking hold of the drunkard, and he comes out of its hands an ascetic; of the miser, and he becomes the open-handed friend of God and man; the sensualist it makes chaste; persecuting Saul, Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ; Mary Magdalen in whom were seven devils, the weeping follower of her Lord when all men forsook him. Oh, there is a spirit, there is a life in the words of Jesus, which may be felt but cannot be told! When he speaks directly to the heart, that heart cannot resist; *it must break!*

Let it not be insinuated that the change is but *temporary*. Here, too, facts are decisive, that the new life, breathed into the soul at conversion, not only continues as long as the natural, but perceptibly grows and becomes vigorous, while the other as perceptibly decays; thus verifying the promise: "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall be fat and flourishing; they shall bring forth fruit in old age." The conclusion we draw from all this is, that when we put our confidence in Christ we confide in one who will never disappoint us. Thus, though unable to draw the veil from the scenes of the other life, to see what is doing there, we may form a good conjecture from what he is doing here. He now gives a

new life to the soul: can he not give the life of glory of which it is an emblem? Nay, what is the life of heaven, on the grand and beautiful principles of his system, but the *lengthening out and expansion* of that given in regeneration? It is not another, but the same new life, going on, always growing, and through endless ages increasing with the increase of God. The seed of grace is the seed of immortality.

Fourthly. To one other proof I will call your notice. Every true Christian has, with greater or less evidence, witness within himself that Christ has the gift of eternal life. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." We cannot explain this distinctly. It seems to be a second consciousness, — an instinct imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God, which, taking the place of argument and logical deduction, gives all the certainty and repose to the mind which it experiences at the close of a mathematical demonstration. It is connected with, or rather constituted by, such exercises as these: a conviction of sin and helplessness; a perception of the infinite glory and suitableness of the plan of salvation by Christ, and an entire resting in it; a view of the absolute insufficiency of every other; and all this, as we have said, not the result of study and meditation, but *the direct teaching of the Holy Ghost.*

Do not call it a delusion. No man has a right to sit in judgment over a sentiment he has never himself experienced; and, of all unreasonable decisions, that is the most unreasonable, which brands a certain class of feelings with the odious name of fanaticism,

on no other ground than the incompetency of the decider to appreciate them. Besides, that the internal persuasion referred to is not a delusion can be proved by its excellent effects. It enables the plainest and most unlettered Christian to hold fast his confidence in the Saviour, though deprived by his position of all ability to investigate the external evidence. It arms him against the assaults of error; and many are the disciples of the Master, who, without this anointing of the Holy One, would make dreadful shipwreck of their faith. But here is their preservative. Let the enemy drive them from all their strongholds of argument. There is *one* where he cannot reach them. They can take refuge in their own hearts, and appeal to that unutterable sense of a Saviour's love which has been shed there by the Holy Spirit. They can afford to be discomfited in the field of argument; for who in earth or hell can forbid them *to feel?* Who shall tear from their heart's core the persuasion planted *there*, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that nothing can separate from his love? I have little hope that this statement will meet the approbation of all who hear me. "Pure rant and fanaticism," some are internally ejaculating. My devout and fervent prayer for every one of you is, that you may die, if you have not the grace to live, just *such ranters*, just *such fanatics!*

And now, in closing, let me urge upon you the serious improvement of what has been said. We have not distracted you with a multitude of topics. Two truths only have been presented, and of these,

one is so *awful*, and the other so *precious*, that you are without excuse if you suffer either to be forgotten. The first is, that they who reject the gospel Saviour *reject their life*. The second is, they who do receive him are *eternally secure*. What reception do you intend giving them? Where do you propose to build for eternity? Do not say that you are still in suspense. This would be paying your understanding a very sorry compliment, and it is not true. There is not one of you but is trusting in something. You all have a hope. Whether it be a good hope, or that of the hypocrite, which is a spider's web; — whether it be clay, or sand, or stubble, or the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, — oh, this is a question well worth the pains of studying! and I solemnly call upon you to study it with all the powers of your souls, remembering the words of Christ: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." Sad will be the issue, if, with your opportunities, you build on a false foundation. You, and your refuges of lies, shall be destroyed together.

One word to you in the ministry. It is your high privilege to be ambassadors of Christ, for the purpose of announcing to a lost race the eternal life he has secured for all who accept his gracious proffers. While you appreciate the honor, forget not its responsibilities. Be faithful to the trust reposed in you; and while you point to the golden city in the skies, let men see that you are yourselves walking in the pathway which leads to it. Imitate, while you preach,

your blessed Master; so that when he, who is your life shall appear, you may, with a goodly number of his followers to whose salvation your labors have contributed, stand before him and say, "Father, here am I and the children whom thou hast given me."

Trustworthiness of the Evangelists.

XIII.

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE EVANGELISTS.

John 19 : 34. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

THE incident here recorded is one which appears to have made a singularly deep impression on the mind of the narrator. The other disciples, panic-stricken at the horrors which were accumulating over their Divine Master, and alarmed for their personal safety, had forsaken him and fled. John alone remained, chained to the spot by love to him on whose bosom he had so often reclined, and recollections of whose divine tenderness and wisdom clustered round his heart amidst all the appalling circumstances which surrounded him. He places himself at the foot of the cross, determined to be a critical observer of everything that should transpire,—suppressing all those emotions, the indulgence of which might interfere with the stern and solemn duty which the providence of God had imposed upon him, as the official reporter; and the result is, the inestimable privilege, enjoyed by the church, of having a faithful record by an eye-witness of the whole train of events on which she builds her immortal hope.

Among the astonishing facts which arrest his no-

tice, none appeared so inexplicable as the flow of a mingled stream of water and blood from the stricken side of his Master. He does not pronounce it in so many words a *miracle*. But that it was in his eyes *wonderful*, — *portentous;* that there seemed to be something, the occurrence of which his readers would be slow to credit, is plain from his earnest and reiterated affirmation of the truth of his testimony, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."

What appeared so unaccountable to the Evangelist, has, with the light thrown upon it by modern science, lost much of its mystery. It is now perfectly well known, that the *pericardium*, or membranous bag which envelopes the heart, contains a quantity of lymph, or watery fluid, designed to lubricate the parts and enable them to perform with ease the actions on which depends the very existence of the vital principle. In a sound and normal condition of body, the quantity is *small;* not more than will fill a table-spoon. But there is a disease not uncommon, frequently produced, physicians tell us, by mental agitation, in which the secretion is so abundant, that it becomes a regular *dropsy*, known by the name of dropsy of the pericardium. Its connection with strong mental excitement, particularly that of grief, is stated in all our books of medicine. Usually its progress is slow and gradual, as with other dropsical affections; but in a system predisposed by the concurrence of causes favorable to its production, a few hours will develop it with fearful malignity. The

sudden death by disease of the heart which sometimes takes place, the patient having previously been subjected to depressing influences, may, in many cases, be attributed to this source.

That the blessed Saviour should have suffered during the few last days of his life under this affection, is nothing more than might be expected from his unparalleled sufferings. In the garden, such was their intensity, that he is heard exclaiming, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" and the sweat pours from his body as great drops of blood. What a picture of agony is here! I will not be charged with exaggerating, when I say that had a skilful modern pathologist been present on the occasion, he would have pronounced that the individual before him could hardly escape a *disease of the heart*. The sorrows of Gethsemane are followed by the treason of Judas; his trial before the bar of Pilate; exposure to the taunts and demoniac rage of an ungodly rabble; the purple robe and crown of thorns, followed by a death the most cruel that the devilish ingenuity of man could invent.

Now, the frail organism of his body was liable to all the vicissitudes which those of his younger brethren experience; subject to the same laws of life, affected by the same morbific influences, and, if not cut off prematurely, would have perished, as other organisms, by disease, or old age. That it should have been the subject of a malady so often found in companionship with excessive mental torture, need not astonish, but rather lead us to adore the depths of divine wisdom, which has thus furnished the

church with an irrefragable proof, to endure forever, of the *reality of our Saviour's death.*

You are aware that infidelity labors to throw doubt on the great cardinal fact of our religion,— the resurrection of Jesus; by suggesting that he did not *really* die; adopting the theory of the Jews, that he had only become insensible, and, being resuscitated by friends who had access to the body, was able on the third day to present himself to his admiring disciples a living man. Extravagant as this hypothesis may be, it is calculated to perplex. No arguments are more unreasonable, but, at the same time, more difficult to answer, than those drawn from abstract possibilities. We may appeal to probability in its highest form, to the natural and almost invariable course of human events; still the concession that *it may be so*, involving no direct and palpable contradiction, has a chilling effect on the strongest minds: we feel the absence of that overpowering conviction always desirable, but which seems absolutely necessary where the truth involves our dearest, nay, eternal interests. Happily, the simple circumstance recorded in the text meets effectually this hypothesis. A Roman soldier, with spear in hand, advances to the victim who had already ceased giving proofs of life, though vital action was probably not extinct, pierces him in the side, penetrating the pericardium, and immediately the phenomenon occurs, which places the reality of his death beyond the reach of scepticism. A wound in that vital part is known to be as fatal as injury to the heart itself; but there was not a wound merely; the membrane was

completely ruptured, and from the gaping orifice proceeded "water mingled with blood." The water issued, as already stated, from the pericardium. It could have had *no other source*. The torrent of blood proved that the aorta, or great artery of the heart, had also received mortal injury. Thus, the two facts in their combination establish, with surprising force of evidence, the truth of both the great events, which have ever been regarded the central points of our holy faith, — the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

Now, the point to which we call your special attention is this; that our narrator had no knowledge whatever of the scientific bearings of this tissue of events. John did not know that he had a pericardium which contained a lubricating water. He was not a physician, and even had he been, the science of those days would have furnished no solution of what he saw. Of the relation of the heart to the human system, as the great blood-fountain which sends the vital fluid leaping through a thousand channels to every part; of the existence of a membranous bag enclosing it, and containing lymph, or a watery fluid, which in certain conditions of the system, undergoes enormous increase; of the certain fatality that attends a rupture of this exquisite machinery, he understood as little, as of the chemical composition of water, or the anatomy of the brain. The whole affair was a *paradox*, an *enigma*, and, accordingly, we find him giving, in another part of his writings, an allegorical solution of it: "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but

water and blood." To understand this, we must bear in mind the two great methods of ceremonial purification in the Jewish church, — blood and water, which were usually combined. After the transgressor had made expiation by sacrifice, sprinkling himself with its blood, he was required to wash in pure water, on which he was restored to his former standing in the house of God. The blood and water from the Redeemer's side symbolized to the thoughtful, and imaginative John the perfection of his saving work. It realized all the expressive adumbrations of the Mosaic law. The whole idea of cleansing from moral pollution was exhausted in it, so that nothing remains to be desired, or even thought of. Such is the probable meaning of that obscure expression, "He came by water and blood; not by water only, but also blood."

With this we have no concern, however, at present. Our object, in the remarks that follow, is to offer a few general illustrations of the *candor*, *honesty*, and *truthfulness* of the sacred historians of the New Testament. The question then presents itself: Why did St. John relate an occurrence to him so unintelligible, and which only tended to strengthen the prejudices which his countrymen entertained against the truth? The reason is, *he saw it.* He could not dovetail it with any theory. With his own eyes he gazed at the mysterious stream issuing from the smitten rock of his salvation, and he could no more withhold the mention of what he observed, than that of any other fact of which he was personally cognizant. As to giving a commentary, does it ever enter

an honest man's mind to give a commentary on what he *actually saw?* Many might stumble at the record. He would probably be called a liar, or a poor fantastic simpleton, on whom no dependence could be placed within the sphere of his monomaniacal illusions. But he must put up with all these consequences; for the transaction occurred *in his presence.* There was no mistake in the matter: "He that saw it bare record, and his witness is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."

We will not stop but for a moment to enumerate the marks of veracity which a narrative must bear to make a claim on our faith. They are well known, every day acted on, and so sure that few are deceived who take pains to avoid it. Of all parts men have taken it into their heads to play, that of liars is the most difficult, if the story be in the least complicated or embrace a great variety of particulars. Whatever be their skill in deception, we are sure to detect them by the Ithuriel spear of questions like these: are they circumstantial in their relations, giving opportunity to all acquainted with the subject to compare their own observations, and ascertain whether there be or be not essential discrepancies? Are they, if more than one, accordant with each other, and yet not too accordant; in other words, is their harmony so combined with difference of statement as proves that they did not act on a preconcerted scheme? Is their manner plain, downright, simple, without any appearance of art or subtlety? Is it vivid, such as characterizes a man who describes what he has seen with his own eyes? Is it candid,

embracing facts which the witnesses would certainly have withheld if they intended fraud? Are the incidents such as they were incapable of fabricating if they had not taken place? Finally, are they disinterested? Can it be shown that they receive no advantage from their story, but are exposed by it to danger, privation, and death itself; and is it a fact that many have actually endured the last extremity of mortal suffering rather than gainsay any part of it? It is not in the nature of falsehood to unite, under any circumstances, these characters of truth. They are the stamps of Heaven itself, which no ingenuity can counterfeit, and they are all found in those remarkable narratives from which we draw our religious consolations and our most exalted hopes.

Let us advert to some of them, taking care, however, to divest ourselves of all prejudgments. This, indeed, is far from easy. Trained from earliest infancy to profound reverence for our religion, our imagination has invested its original chroniclers with a mysterious sanctity. We fear to scan them closely, lest *we offend the Spirit of God;* and applying to them those rules by which we try the productions of men like ourselves, seems like the fearful presumption of those who, under the old economy, would have dared to enter the holy place, and curiously survey the mystic ark. But this is sheer superstition. Had our religion a voice, it would tell us that it is never better pleased than when it encounters some critical Thomas, who wants to give it and its human witnesses a thorough handling. Christians lose much of the peace and trustful confidence of piety, by not holding

more frequent converse with these excellent men, simply *as men*, bearing all the lineaments of our common humanity. Gazing in mute reverence at John and Paul in the pulpit, they are bashfully shy to meet them in the parlor and the walks of private life: the consequence is, deplorable ignorance of that moral loveliness of character, that lofty personal integrity on which must rest all enlightened belief in their divine inspiration. For, I ask, what evidence have we that these good men spake as they were moved of the Holy Ghost? Because, you reply, the sacred influence was promised by Christ. Most true; but how do we know that it was *promised?* — from the narratives of those who followed him during his eventful ministry. Plainly, therefore, our faith in the doctrine of their inspiration is based entirely on their trustworthiness *without it*. The truth, that they were organs of the Spirit of God, is not a house built in the air, but has its basement in the earth: it requires the profound and undoubting conviction that they were *honest men*.

That they were so, look, in the first place, at the exactness and overflowing profusion of their accounts, so opposite to everything we would expect from a putter-forth of falsehoods. If deception was their object, they were the most extraordinary persons that ever set up the trade. The events they profess to relate took place in the midst of the people, under circumstances of the greatest publicity. They occurred but a few years before, so that hundreds of thousands were still in life, who could judge of the correctness of the accounts from personal

knowledge. Never did men lay themselves so completely open to detection. The scene of their story is not the desert of Arabia, or some obscure corner of a province in the outposts of civilization, but the very centre of the Roman empire, exceeded by no other part in the number of cities and the extent of population. They mark, with almost wearisome minuteness, the times of the principal transactions, the places where they occurred, and the persons who figured in them. Jesus was born under Herod the Great, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, at the time when there went forth a decree that the whole empire should be taxed. The taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. His parents resided in Nazareth, a town of Galilee. He was born, however, in Bethlehem. The place of his baptism was Bethabara beyond Jordan. Among the various places he is recorded as visiting and honoring with exhibitions of his miraculous powers are Cana, Sychar, Chorazin, Nain, Gadara, Cesarea, Philippi, the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, Decapolis, Jericho, Bethany, Bethphage, Jerusalem. In all these, something memorable is recorded to have taken place, which the inhabitants *could not possibly have forgotten.* The celebrated Sermon on the Mount was preached on a hill near the city of Capernaum. The water was turned into wine in Cana of Galilee. At Nain he restores to life the widow's son. At Bethany he raises Lazarus from the dead. If you doubt it, go to Bethany. Names of persons are detailed with the same precision, as also their parentage, business, and civil dignities. It was *Nicodemus* who came to

Jesus by night, and he was a Jewish senator. Joseph was another, and his native city was Arimathea. Mary, from whom seven demons were cast, belonged to Magdala. Whoever doubted the miracle, might visit that city and ask the inhabitants.

Not content with such specifications as these, our writers, as if they had set their hearts on provoking scrutiny to the utmost, relate events of which there were thousands of spectators gathered from every part of the land. Witness the feeding of five thousand men, besides women and children, near the city of Bethsaida; many of whom were certainly alive twenty-five years after, when one of the Gospels was published. But what shall we say of the public appearances of Jesus in the midst of the Jewish metropolis? Passing over his triumphant procession amidst the hosannas of an immense concourse of people, strewing garments and branches in his way; his overturning the tables of the money-changers; his memorable exclamation in the temple, where all Israel was assembled to keep the feast of tabernacles; fix your eye a moment on the circumstances of his trial and death. It occurred at the Passover. The trial is stated to have been conducted before the great Sanhedrim; next, before Pilate, by whom it was transferred to Herod, who happened to be at that time in Jerusalem, who remanded it to the Roman governor. He is publicly condemned, buffeted, spit upon, borne amid the execrations of the populace to the common place of execution, and there suspended between two malefactors on the cursed tree. After his resurrection, the narrative states he was seen

by *five hundred* persons at once, many of whom were living at the time the account was published. Now, I am not assuming the positive truth of these minute statements. I only say that they were *made*, — made *at the time*, — made when every incident was fresh in the minds of men; that their enemies did not attempt to confute them but by the sword of persecution, and listened in sullen silence to the bold challenge of Peter, on the day of Pentecost, when he declared that, "They had crucified and slain a man approved of God among them by miracles and wonders and signs, which," he adds, "God did by him *in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know*."

And now the question fairly meets us, whether, under such circumstances, we can believe that the authors of our record were retailers of fiction. If so, we must go a step further, and pronounce them the most impudent madmen ever permitted to go at large; while their enemies, in not exposing their falsehoods, and thus putting a stop to the progress of their religion, displayed an idiocy without example in the annals of mankind.

Observe, next, their agreement in all the essentials of their testimony. No criterion of veracity is more satisfactory than this, provided it does not lead to suspect a previous combination. When a number of independent witnesses attest the same facts, agreeing as to time, place, and other circumstances, we are not readily persuaded that they intend a fraud. We do not, however, require a *perfect* harmony. So great is the variety of disposition, talent, and mode of conceiving things among men, that no two indi-

viduals will give the same identical statement of what passed before their eyes. A part of the transaction which may have riveted the notice of the one may have been scarcely perceived by the other, and soon forgotten; consequently, there not only *may* but must be discrepancies in their statements, which enlightened judges in the matter consider so many proofs of their substantial veracity. On the other hand, too complete a harmony is always suspicious; we pronounce it unnatural, and cry out "*a conspiracy!*"

With regard to our writers, — their general agreement cannot but impress every candid inquirer. Follow them from chapter to chapter in their thrilling story of our Redeemer's life and death; compare their accounts of the miracles he wrought; his sublime discourses; his instructive, and delightful parables; his stern reproofs, and awful predictions; — you find their harmony as surprising, as it must be satisfying, to a mind earnest in search of truth. There are apparent exceptions, doubtless. Nay, we grant that some of their disagreements have hitherto resisted every attempt at solution. But is it not certain, then, that they were *not in concert?* Had they purposed to deceive, would they not most studiously have endeavored to keep clear of all collision or distant appearance of contradiction? How different their actual policy, if policy that may be called which is no policy, but the plain, straightforward course of an ingenuous mind. Whether they had seen each other's narratives is a question debated by the learned; but, in whatever way we decide it, none will assert that

they made an improper use of them. Each pursues his own track; each relates what he personally saw, or thoroughly knew from other sources, without troubling himself to ask whether there was another writer on the same subject in existence. What a beautiful proof of the high, unbending integrity of these men of God!

Another feature is their extraordinary *candor*. It is a hard necessity, says the proverb, which compels a man to speak ill of himself. Even where one has a strong disposition to be honest, and tell a plain, unvarnished tale, he must have an uncommon strength of character to maintain his purpose when stared in the face by personal humiliation. History can furnish a very small number of examples where all selfish regards have been completely merged in the love of truth. But some it does furnish, and the brightest of them is that of our excellent writers. They take not the least pains in the world to conceal circumstances which might expose their Master and themselves to contempt; nor even try to color them. As to their Master, they tell us he was born in a filthy caravansera, the citizen of a town so infamous that it became a Jewish proverb, — "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" He lived in extreme indigence, was despised by the literati and his own kinsfolk, condemned at last as a vile malefactor, and joined with robbers and murderers in his death. Nor did he, in meeting his fate, display that boiling courage so much admired and always expected in the world's heroes. He was exceedingly *afraid* of his approaching sufferings, and his agony broke forth in

a sweat, "as it were great drops of blood." All this they tell, though they knew that such a life, terminated by such a death, must be to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness. As to themselves, they own they were bred to the lowest occupations, — one of them being an infamous tax-gatherer, the others fishermen. Freely they confess their stupidity, their worldly ambition, their almost incredible unbelief in the midst of miracles, their shocking cowardice in forsaking him during his last trial. On one occasion, two of them are described as engaging in an idle dispute, fomented by their mother, *which* should be prime minister in his kingdom. On another, they are thrown into frightful despair by a storm, while he was in the midst of them. On another, with strange bigotry and ferocity, they ask him to do them the favor of calling down fire from heaven on a whole village of Samaritans. During his awful agonies in Gethsemane, they confess that, instead of cheering him with their loving sympathy, they "*fell asleep.*" Nor do they conceal that a short half-hour before his betrayal his holy soul was wounded by a strife that arose among them, *who* should be greatest. Can we suspect that men so ingenuous in confessing their misconduct, so ample in particulars which disgraced both them and their cause, were sporting fables? Such is not the stuff which fabulists employ.

Another fine characteristic of truth is the charming simplicity of their narrative. Everything is plain, easy, unforced. In reading them, we seem to be reading a story taken down from the lips of some

lovely children, describing to their mates something which they had just been witnessing. With what simplicity do they *begin* their accounts! The reader's mind is not warmed up for receiving favorable impressions by pompous exordiums, or elaborate essays on the great importance of the subject. Like plain people, who have no other business but to state *facts*, they enter on it immediately; and when the business is done they are done also. When miracles are described, it is in few words. No previous expectation is excited; no rhetorical exclamations uttered on the grandeur of the achievement, or the majesty of the performer. Remark, also, that they are by no means fond of *multiplying* them, though they had ample opportunity. Jesus lived thirty-three years on the earth, while his public ministry was limited to two or three. Why did they not fill up the previous thirty with magnificent exhibitions of his wonder-working power? Why do we not find in our gospels, as in the apocryphal writings, forged a century after, marvellous accounts of the prodigies wrought by the infant Jesus and his mother Mary? Had they been men of art, they would not have left to the imagination so long a blank in the life of their Divine Master. But as the honest souls knew nothing on the subject, they chose to say nothing.

Another pleasing feature is the absence of all attempts (as with John, in the text) to give rational expositions of their statements. So perfectly do they seem to know their truth, that the question whether any part needs the bolstering of a few reflections in order to make them probable, never sug-

gests itself. In consequence, there are some things in their story that appear strange, which we are apt to wonder they did not elucidate. Is it not strange, for example, that Judas should have so long continued with the Saviour, a witness to his miracles and teachings, and prove in the issue a traitor? We are told that the people continued to disbelieve, even after they had seen diseases healed by a word, and, as in the case of Lazarus, the coffined dead rise from their graves. We almost involuntarily ask, whether this is *possible?* It appears that he ate his last passover with the disciples a whole day before the appointed time. In these cases, they might easily have smoothed the asperities of their narrative by explanatory comments. But they felt that writing comments was not their mission. The incidents described might appear improbable, but they *knew* their truth, and that their whole work was to "testify what they did know."

Their style, also, richly merits notice. It was the remark of a distinguished French scholar, that, if ever Truth should make herself visible, and hold conversation with men, she would employ the language of the writers of the New Testament. No man of taste will think the sentiment exaggerated. It is characterized throughout by so sweet and almost infantile artlessness; is so pure, transparent, and unstudied, that we would be as much surprised to find a lie concealed in it as were the guardian-angels of our first parents at detecting Satan in the bowers of Eden. The ear is not seduced, by the melody of finely balanced periods, to lend her influence in bias-

ing the judgment. No turgid metaphors captivate the imagination; nay, there is not in the whole four Gospels one pompous or shining expression. All is pure, unadorned, lovely nature. Thank God, Christians, that, if you have been deceived in your book, you have been *well deceived.* I would rather receive the falsehoods of such men than many other men's truths.

But I must hasten to the crowning thought, — a thought which, in the judgment of every enlightened and good man, must put the question before us at rest forever. It is *the character which the writers set before us of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

With a few reflections on this topic, which will come infinitely short, however, of doing it justice, we shall conclude our discourse.

When I open the New Testament to examine its varied contents, I meet a phenomenon, more wonderful than all its miracles united, in the picture which it gives of a *perfect moral being.* I take up this being, at the commencement of his existence, and make him my study. I follow him through the whole of his eventful career, step by step; treasuring up every word, analyzing every action and thought, with all the severity of philosophical scepticism. I enter with him into every company, and mark his deportment to friends and enemies; to the wise and foolish; in prosperity and adversity; in honor and dishonor. I sit with him in the house of the despised publican; on the well-stone, while he unfolds to a Samaritan woman all (to use her own expressive language)

that ever she did; and in the temple, while he confounds the Jewish doctors. I sail with him on the Sea of Tiberias, and ascend with him the Mount of Olives. I follow in his train when he rides in triumph through the streets of Jerusalem, and join the little band with whom he ate his last supper. I accompany him to the garden of Gethsemane, and the judgment-seat of Pilate. I attend him with the beloved disciple to the cross, — stand under it, and hear his expiring groans.

After all this intimate companionship; this pursuing him like his shadow wherever he goes; this constant inspection of every movement, every utterance, every look, I sit down and calmly ask, — What is the impression he produces on my mind? Does he realize all my imagination can conceive, when it strains its powers to form a notion of the being whom God would send into the world as the incarnated image of himself, if he purposed to bestow such a favor? My answer is, *he does*, *he does*. His excellence is complete. I cannot, under the intensest actings of the conceptive faculty, alter, without defacing, a single feature in the bright character he exhibited. I can add nothing to the wisdom of his discourses, the affecting grace and sweetness of his manner, and the lustre of his virtue. I can do nothing but fall on my knees, and exclaim with the centurion, "Surely this man was the Son of God." In love and charity to men, he stands *alone*. His whole thought was the communication of happiness, and there is not an action of his life in which private ease or honor was the object of pursuit. He existed

but for others. Sometimes we read of his weeping, but never over his own unmerited sorrows; sometimes, of his rejoicing; but never over a favorable change in his own fortunes. He wept for the unbelief and perversity of men; he rejoiced on such occasions as that, when hearing of the success of his gospel, he exclaimed, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." Sometimes, we hear of a slight emotion of anger coloring his pallid cheek; but it was always the displeasure of love, and aimed at the amendment of its object. In numberless instances, he gave proof that all power was committed to him in heaven and in earth; but amid all his cruel provocations he never employed it for the punishment of offenders, — never. All his miracles were benevolent, directly productive of human happiness. All the agonies of the cross could not weaken that love, strong as death, which he bore even to his murderers. In those memorable words uttered just before his dissolution, you have the *whole soul of Jesus*. "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

But we have not yet touched the sublimest feature of this remarkable delineation. In outward condition, he was a poor Jew of the lowest rank, the resident of a contemptible village. For such a one to aim at some obscure distinction among the Rabbis entitling him to hold forth occasionally in a country synagogue, would have indicated more than ordinary ambition. But *his* took a nobler flight. Can we be-

lieve it possible, that from his cradle to his grave, the breast of this ignoble Galilean was heaving with a project which, for splendor, sublimity, and magnificent results, left behind it, at an infinite distance, all that ever entered into the heart of man to conceive? *He determined to reform the world;* to set up a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which, scorning the narrow limits of his own country, of Greece, of Asia, of the Roman empire, should extend over every nation and kindred, tongue and people. He saw the moral universe alienated from its Maker; lost in darkness and corruption. He formed the purpose to *bring it back.* Unwearied, and unappalled by difficulties, he silently went on, laying the foundation for its execution, leaving to his disciples, when he departed from earthly scenes, the peremptory command: "Go and preach my gospel to every creature; go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" "and lo, I am with you alway." I have said that he was a *Jew*, but there was *nothing Jewish* in the soul that could devise so wonderful a scheme as this!

Such is the portrait. Now let us ask, who are the limners? From whose hands do we receive this exquisite painting? From Plato, or Socrates, — from a college of Greek or Roman literati, who combined their splendid powers to form a single picture, which should exhibit to the gaze of an admiring world the beau-ideal of human perfection? Did it even originate from this source, we would have cause to wonder. There is nothing in the literature of classi-

cal antiquity which approaches within a measurable distance of the portraiture of Jesus. The character was too sublime for the miserable sophisters of Greece and Rome even to appreciate when *set before* them. How, then, could they invent it?

But we need not reason on this hypothesis; for we know that the painters were a few low-born, illiterate Galileans, who earned their daily subsistence by selling fish in the paltry villages which bordered on the Sea of Gennesareth. Was it in the power of such men to soar above the dull realities of life, and create the most wonderful combination of moral beauty that has ever engaged the admiration of the world, by a mere effort of imagination? The last thing of which persons in their situation are capable is a happy invention. The vulgar never abstract and recombine the qualities of objects that meet their senses: they cannot therefore describe, unless you place directly under their eyes, the scene to be delineated. They may be *copyists*, but nothing more.

Suppose, however, they feel the stirrings of ambition, and try their hand at a *fancy sketch*, selecting as their subject the idea of a perfect man. What kind of character would they exhibit? Do you not see, at once, that it would partake of all the grossness of their occupation and habits? Set a Nantucket smackman to sketch a hero, and you may easily guess the result. In the first place, he will be a magnificent-looking personage, seven feet high. He will have the voice of a Stentor, and the brawny chest of Hercules. With kindliness of temper he will combine a roughness approaching to ferocity. He will have a

taste for fighting, and not dislike the sight of blood. If endowed with the gift of miracles, he will amuse himself with rolling mountains as ninepins; will be always thundering and lightening; and, in the rapidity of executing his projects, will annihilate time and space. The whole, in short, will be a vile daub, that would betray its authors to the first glance of criticism.

If any reply, that the apostles were of a higher grade of intellect than the persons supposed, we deny it; and are sustained by their whole history, as given by themselves. Look at their low ambition; their puerile contentions with each other; their stupidity, which drew, from the most meek and patient of teachers, the almost querulous exclamation, "How is it that ye do not understand?" Think of their carnal notions of his kingdom, and that blood-thirsty — should I not rather say, diabolical — spirit they evinced in calling on him to bring fire from heaven on the Samaritans, and acknowledge that our four Gospels would be compositions very different from what we find them, were they the inventions of fancy. That, as portraits of intellectual and moral loveliness, they realize our fairest dreams, admits of but one solution. They are *copies*, — like John's blood and water, — copies taken from existing facts; the authors *had the original before them. There* is the secret! So Jesus *was;* so he *felt;* so he spoke and acted. I cannot doubt on this point. Nearly as soon would I think of doubting my own existence.

We have dwelt so long on the subject that no time remains for a regular application. We conclude with

exhorting you to thank God for the precious and faithful record he has put into your hands. He might have addressed you differently. He might have spoken in thunder; have written his will with a pen of fire in the sky; have sent to you Gabriel from his cherubic throne. But is it not far more delightful and satisfactory to hear the familiar voice of those who share in our common nature? What condescension on the part of our Divine Parent! First, he sends his Son, who, before announcing his revelations, becomes *a man;* and when he ascended to his Father's house, left the completion of *his work to men;* as if man, being the object of grace, humanity should impress its stamp on every stone of the great building of mercy. Cultivate an acquaintance with these earthly vessels in which are laid up heavenly treasures. There is nothing to terrify you in their aspect. If an angel were the messenger, the question would sadly perplex, what degree of credit should be given to the strange apparition, and on what principles of evidence a case so novel should be decided. But here you converse with your brethren, bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh; whom you *understand;* in whom you can *confide;* precisely as you trust in parent, wife, and familiar friends; and, believe me, the more you read them without preoccupation, simply regarding their human credibility, the more you will be strengthened in your Christian faith, — in the belief of those glorious facts on which rest your eternal hopes. Happy are they, who study their religion, — not in formulas; not in bristling theological propositions; not in the contro-

versial writings of divines, nor even in the weekly sermons of their preachers; but in the pure, gushing, translucent fountain, — the holy gospels and acts of the apostles. Their life-giving truths will steal into the heart with a gentle force that cannot be resisted; there will be a reflection on the soul of their own simple, inimitable beauty; and, beholding in them, as in an unsullied mirror, the glory of Jesus, you will be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.

The Price of our Redemption.

XIV.

THE PRICE OF OUR REDEMPTION.

1 *Cor.* 6 : 20. For ye are bought with a price.

IN these words the apostle calls our attention to the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, on which he delighted to expatiate with the earnestness of one who felt that his eternal hope was embarked in it. On this doctrine we propose offering a few remarks, and shall attempt to show that he does not overrate its value: "Ye are bought with a price." Evidently a previous servitude is here implied. The natural state of men is a dreadful state, and may be compared to that of one reduced by his crimes to a miserable slavery. We are under the high displeasure of Him who made us; consequently strangers to true happiness in the present world, and exposed to unknown evils in the next. From this state Christians are delivered, — are reinstated in the lost favor of their God, and look forward, with joyful hope, to a heavenly felicity. This complete reversal of a penal sentence which had been solemnly pronounced, our text informs us, was not, and, in the nature of things, *could not* be an arbitrary or purely gratuitous act on the part of God. There were considerations of infinite importance

which rendered the strict execution of the penalty of law absolutely necessary. Previously, therefore, to the reversal, these considerations were to be fairly met and satisfied. This has been done by the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, which constitute, therefore, the price or equivalent of our redemption, as they render to God, in his judicial capacity, all that would have been gained by the rigid execution of the sentence of law. To express the thought in other words: the death of the Son of God has, by answering the designs of punishment, caused the necessity of it to cease, producing so happy a state of things, in relation to the believer, that it has become right, proper, accordant with every principle of good government, to rescue him from his wretchedness, and restore him to the original honors of his race. This is the great truth we intend to illustrate.

First, then, let us inquire what those important considerations are which rendered it unsuitable to save the transgressor by a mere gratuitous act of mercy.

Secondly, let us mark, with pious thankfulness, the complete removal of these considerations by the equivalent rendered in the sufferings and death of the Son of God. Thus shall we understand with what meaning and emphasis the apostle declares, "Ye are bought with a price."

When we say that there are powerful reasons why the Deity should not gratuitously forgive the sinner, we do not affirm that under no circumstances is it possible for him so to exercise his clemency. This view has been taken. But, I confess, I cannot join

in the hardy sentiment. Why may not the universal Monarch do, occasionally and in certain conjunctures, what is done by the meanest earthly potentate, — say to a poor trembling child of guilt, without the formality of a previous atonement, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."

But while we cheerfully yield thus much, — more from courtesy than because we know the fact, — we must protest against the strange notion of those who, erecting the rare and only possible exception into the general rule (the most absurd of all sophistries), contend that the pardoning prerogative *must* be thus exercised in all cases whatever. It is, indeed, surprising that a doctrine which, if practised among the communities of men on the earth, would bring them to an end in one generation, should be thought a highly reasonable maxim of government for the great universal Legislator. The guardians of human law, it is confessed, must punish for the sake of moral influence. If the belief was allowed to prevail that laws were mere *monitions*, — that there was no serious intention to punish disobedience, — the floodgates of crime would be opened at once, and an overwhelming torrent of licentiousness would roll over the land. None would be safe but in bidding the world good-night, and flying from all communion with his species. Our planet would be a hell, and its inhabitants fiends!

All this is plain, and is not denied by them; yet, at the same time, they indulge the whimsical conceit that the *like* necessity of punishing does not exist in the government of God. The train of thought which

leads them to this is, perhaps, something like the following: The civil magistrate, they say, must punish because he has no other method of influencing the conduct of his subjects except by awakening their fears. Punishment, however it may carry the appearance of superior power, is truly the consequence of his weakness, his utter inability to control the internal principles of action, — the hidden spring within. But the all-pervading influences of God can *reach the heart.* The Author of our spirits is under no necessity of providing an array of outward motive to operate on a will, all whose movements he can, at any time and all times, direct by secret agency. Now, I ask, what is the real import of this language, but that man is *devoid of moral responsibility?* God, it seems, can effect his purposes in him by immediate agency. He can go into him, — make him virtuous without motive, and *against* it. It follows, that the sins of men being the effect of his refusing to act, when, by acting, he could have prevented them, are not the proper objects of punishment or even serious blame! However earnestly those we are opposing may disavow these principles, they are the corner-stone of the whole scheme of unconditional forgiveness.

But they are *false.* The common sense of mankind declares them to be so, and pronounces that any other scheme of God's governing rational and free agents than addressing them by moral inducements, leaving the issue to their own unbiased choice, would be a monstrous absurdity! The Creator, it is true, was under no obligation to make us free. Our lib-

erty is the gift of his sovereign goodness. But this constitution being supposed, the eternal laws of truth demanded that he should respect the work of his own hands, and the moral nature he had bestowed upon us. Look at facts. When he placed our first parents in Paradise did he think of controlling their will by secret agency? So far from it he, with *a full view of the lamentable result*, placed them within sight of the fatal tree. How strikingly was the same principle exemplified in his treatment of ancient Israel! It was wonderful. The expressions of his desire for their continuance in obedience are so emphatic that we, in our ignorance and narrowness of conception, are amazed at his not securing it by any degree of violence necessary to the end. But the laws of his administration must not be sacrificed; and he contents himself with giving this solemn warning: "Behold, I set before you a blessing and a curse; a blessing if ye obey the command of the Lord your God, a curse if ye will not." And how did he put honor on his beloved Son when he appeared on the earth? That, on different occasions, the laws of material nature were suspended; that a *virgin* conceived and brought forth a son; that a star was lighted up to direct the steps of inquiring sages to the stable in Bethlehem; that, during his whole career, he stood confessed to be creation's Lord, by the ready obedience she paid to his commands, — all this I know. But I know, too, that even at this memorable era, the will of man, enshrined in its high sanctuary, maintained all her rights; and He who rebuked the winds and waves, reverenced the laws

of our moral constitution. Witness that pathetic address: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not."

Let us, then, fix deeply in our minds, *as a truth* not to be controverted, that we enjoy the noble preëminence of being subject to a government of choice; that there is a something within us *divine*, which must not be coerced; nay, more, that our great Ruler acts honorably toward us in making this distinction the basis of his whole system of moral discipline. Is it asked, what he hath done for us, seeing we have removed the supposition of violence on the will? I reply, that he has fenced the *path of obedience by the most awful penalties.* This was not an arbitrary arrangement. Having made us free, and determined to treat us as such, he was bound to provide such a quantity of inducement to virtue as would afford a rational security against transgression. Nay, I go further and aver that, as the great Conservator of general happiness, he was bound to provide the *strongest possible* motive against sin. To say that a lesser inducement was offered than the strongest possible, is to say that a less security was provided than the case admitted; and would not every delinquent, detected and confronted by his judge, be able, under such circumstances, to address the Holy One thus: "I complain not that thou didst refuse to stop me in my headlong course, by doing violence to my moral nature; but why didst thou neglect offering such cogent *persuasives* as would have proved thy full

determination to maintain the honor of thy law? Thou mightst have denounced on sin thy burning wrath. Why didst thou not? Then I would have viewed it with other eyes; I would have seen that thou art in earnest in prohibiting it, and who can tell whether I might not at this moment be pure as the seraph who stands before thy throne? I deny thy right, God, to complain of a rebellion to which the temptation was held out of impunity in crime."

There is a reflection on this subject, to which I have alluded, but which deserves more formal notice. The empire of God is *one*. And this holds true, we have reason to think, of the physical universe. Immense as are the distances between those mighty orbs which revolve in mystic dance with our earth around the sun, they are truly but parts of one magnificent system, in which, by a reciprocal balancing and attraction, each becomes subservient to the well-being of all the rest. The bold language of the poet is thought to be philosophically true:

> "From nature's chain, whatever link you strike,
> Tenth or tenth thousand, breaks the chain alike.
> Let earth unbalanced from her orbit fly, —
> Planets and suns rush lawless through the sky."

Whether this be so is conjectural; but that such a mutual influence prevails in the universe of mind, that from the noblest archangel down through all intermediate classes of rational beings to the meanest child of Adam, there is a "chain of strong connection and nice dependency," is not conjecture, but one of those sublime truths communicated to us by divine revelation. We are told that the chariots of

God are twenty thousand, yea, thousands of angels, all of whom are perfectly acquainted with man, and take the deepest interest in the plan devised for his salvation. They desire to look into its mysteries, and their instruction is represented to be one of the principal objects contemplated by its glorious Author. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." I call up this fact to impress upon you the deeply interesting truth, that, though *you* may think yourselves a very inconsiderable part of God's moral dominion, a mere molecule or atom, there is yet such connection with every other part and every other atom, that your example may be of mighty efficacy throughout the whole system. It is natural to believe that when the apostasy took place, worlds of free agents like ourselves waited in anxious suspense to see what would be done by the insulted Lawgiver. Had he instantly pronounced an unconditional pardon, who will venture to predict the consequences? Some idea of the consequences may be formed by considering what led to this very apostasy. Our first parents yielded to the seductions of a being who presented himself to them in the character of an *unpunished transgressor!* He had eaten of the forbidden tree, with benefit instead of harm: from which they inferred that the Deity wanted either will or power to execute his threat, — probably both, — and thus were they ruined by the very expectation of escape. If previously they had known that a band of rebellious spirits had fallen from the battlements of heaven to

writhe in eternal pain, might they not have come triumphant from the conflict, — might they not? But pardon, O God, the presumption of thy creature.

There were doubtless good reasons for leaving our first parents ignorant of so terrific a lesson; and their resources of resistance were, without it, amply sufficient, as they had the express declaration of Him who cannot lie, that death is the wages of sin.

I have thus endeavored to show you, from the very nature of moral government, that the forgiveness of sinners is a work of serious difficulty; nay, that there are considerations rendering it nearly, if not absolutely, impossible. Far from us be the thought, with which we are sometimes charged, of imputing to God the temper of a vindictive despot. We believe that he is infinitely benevolent, a fathomless ocean of goodness. But, at the same time, we shall not allow ourselves to forget that it is a goodness worthy of him, and exercised in perfect harmony with every other attribute in his nature. It is *wise*, *holy*, *enlightened* goodness, — takes extended views of things, and will never sacrifice to any partial regards the cause of universal happiness. Let our rationalists, as they call themselves, combat these ideas with as much earnestness as they permit themselves to feel on any religious theme, — the common apprehensions of mankind are against them. A feeling of misery and sad foreboding of being under the displeasure of a powerful and inexorable avenger, is as congenial to the human mind as the sense of religion itself. Wherever we go, in lands unblest with gospel light,

we discover altars smoking with blood, dark and sepulchral temples, rites of awful import, pallid and fear-stricken worshippers. Why is this?

It is easy, indeed, to reply that these are the common effects of superstition, whose characteristic it is to inspire false and groundless terrors. But, I ask, why is this? Why does superstition so uniformly clothe herself in blackness, and speak in thunder; so rarely present an object of worship divested of terrible attributes, that in the whole history of the world we scarce find an instance of a false religion which inspired its votary with courage or consolation? Why, even in Christian lands, are those gloomy representations we are not afraid of advocating, so extensively popular, that, in many places, their opponents cannot make their voice to be heard when they ask to be recognized as a sect? They are not wanting in zeal for propagating, what they consider, more pleasing views of the divine administration; they build churches, they send from the press eloquent appeals inviting their fellow-men to join them in the delightful contemplation of a Being all-merciful, who knows not how to punish. Yet they are hardly listened to; their splendid temples are passed by, and the multitude, of both wise and foolish, are seen thronging to those conventicles where it is not scrupled to be said that "a God all mercy is a God unjust," and the flaming sword of penal retribution is unceasingly brandished in the sinner's face. Many, even, who strongly dislike our doctrine, pay its teacher the compliment of sitting beneath his instructions, — turning away from the honeyed rhetoric of the

very men with whom they profess community of sentiment, as if they were listening to that glozing tale which betrayed our first progenitors to ruin: "Hath God said, 'Ye shall surely die?' Ye shall not surely die!" Ah! There is a deep inborn *sense of right*, in every human bosom, which approves our statements. There is a tribunal, in *the man himself*, to which we carry our appeal, and before which we urge with victorious energy that the righteous Judge must vindicate his insulted laws, though a world perish! This conviction it is which gives the evangelical ministry all their power over you. You may dislike the men, and find fault with many of their representations. You may complain of their scholastic phraseology, contracted views, and neglect of those winning arts, which, without detracting from the fidelity of their instructions, would render them tenfold more persuasive. Yet, with all their defects, they touch a chord which seldom fails to vibrate. Their voice, though harsh and dissonant its tones, is echoed by a voice from the bottom of your hearts, and you tremble at the difficulties of your salvation.

We now proceed to consider the manner in which these difficulties have been overcome by the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. It is not my design at present to describe these sufferings. You are acquainted with the history, and know that a more dismal tragedy was never acted on the world's surface. The wildest imagination cannot paint deeper agonies than those undergone by this immaculate and Divine Personage. We gaze at the Heaven-deserted victim, hanging convulsed on the cursed tree, scarcely know-

ing what to think of the government of God, which permits such a shocking catastrophe. But our perplexity instantly ceases when we learn the true character of this amazing transaction. "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities!"

If asked how the death of Christ produces the effect we ascribe to it, of removing the obstacles to our salvation, I answer, that, however unable to fathom the depths of this mystery, I yet find no difficulty in understanding that it is a complete answer to the reasons, which, as we have seen, placed the great Ruler under the necessity of punishing. I think I see, with perfect clearness of evidence, that, in the terrible example of severity exercised on the most exalted Being who has appeared in the society of men, the whole family of moral agents in heaven and earth, so far from losing motives to obedience by the sinner's salvation, have been infinitely gainers. Whether our proposition contains the whole truth I know not; but it is amply sufficient for my faith and hope. I need no other view of the efficacy of my Saviour's death in order to understand that it is a proper "price" of my redemption.

There are those, however, who cannot enjoy the comfort of this cheering doctrine. It has a very extraordinary aspect in their eyes. Especially do they scruple the reasonableness and justice of transferring the pains denounced on guilt to an innocent person. Objections of this nature often proceed from honest hearts, and are therefore not to be treated with contempt.

As to the *extraordinary* character of the fact, we grant it; but we plead in its favor the equally extraordinary emergency. A world of immortals was to be brought back, from a foul revolt, to God and happiness. But to bring them back without giving a lesson to the universe, sufficient at least to neutralize this example of impunity, would have been, as we have proved, a wanton wrong on the whole moral kingdom of God. Certain preparatory arrangements, then, were necessary; a demonstration must be made, — if possible, some imposing, sensible representation, — to seize forcibly on the mind, and by calling up awful ideas of the heinousness of sin fortify it against the perilous sight of rebels aggrandized by transgression. Now, I contend, the wit of man, tasked to the utmost, never would fall upon an expedient half so efficacious as that actually adopted, — exhibiting to men and angels the spectacle of a spotless being — a partner in the throne which had been dishonored — voluntarily undergoing an accursed death in place of the guilty. I appeal to the natural feelings of every one who hears me, whether the salutary horror which it is the design of punishment to inspire, would not be wrought up to the *highest pitch* by a good man stepping before the criminal and baring his own bosom to the sword?

It is true that human tribunals refuse to accept such sacrifices. Why is this, it has been asked. If the idea of substitution be so congenial to the mind, why are not sufferings transferred from the guilty to the innocent, in the administration of justice among men? This is a fair question, and demands a fair

and manly reply. We are bound to show that whatever analogy exists between the government of God and of men in other respects, it here utterly fails; in other words, that there are valid reasons why the civil magistrate never recurs to vicarious atonement, which reasons do not apply to the great transaction on Mount Calvary. As we believe that the denial of our doctrine owes all its plausibility to wrong views on this one point, we are anxious to set it before you in its true light.

We say then, in the first place, that the civil magistrate abstains from applying the vicarious principle, because the capital punishment of the innocent citizen in place of the guilty would be an act of *personal injustice*, which no regards of general expediency would justify. Nor would the injustice be removed by his free consent. He has *no right* to consent. His happiness and life are a precious trust, which he dare not surrender except at the call of him who gave them. But this argument is utterly devoid of force when applied to the Great Mediator. That wonderful constitution of his person, by which he was distinguished from all the creatures of God, gives him the perfect disposal of his own life, the absolute power of laying it down whenever the sacrifice appeared necessary to the public good. Besides, the injury he received was not like that sustained by a mere human victim, desperate and irremediable. When the good man has once laid down his life for his friend, there is no return to the joys he has left. He will never again see the light of the sun, nor the happy faces of wife and children. His beneficence

has cost him *his all*, and justice will not tolerate the thought of so immense a calamity falling on the head of innocence, though innocence itself invite the blow. But the death of our Redeemer on the cross had a very different issue. The king of terrors could have no lasting dominion over the Lord of life: accordingly, after three days' slumber in the tomb, he rose in the majesty of his Godhead, and ascended to the Father's right hand, rejoicing in the happy issue of his glorious toils. His case is thus essentially different from any which can be supposed in the ordinary course of human affairs. An example was set of awful retribution; yet the blameless victim, instead of suffering ultimate loss, has, by a wonderful disposition of events, become as really a gainer as the objects of his redeeming love.

Another decisive objection to the admission of vicarious suffering by a human tribunal is, that instead of deterring from crimes it would, by its frequent repetition, encourage them, and thus contravene the very end of punishment. It is evident that the civil magistrate must govern his conduct by general rules. If he allows, in any instance, an innocent citizen to suffer for the guilty, he is forced to allow it in all, and thus the universal maxim would be established, that provided an evil-doer can obtain a substitute to bear the punishment of his sins, he is certain of impunity. It may be said that the principle of self-love in men would sufficiently guard against the frequency of such occurrences as voluntary suffering for the good of others. But they who say this are little acquainted with the strange

mechanism of the human mind. Do we not see, every day, men fronting death in its most appalling forms for the most trifling considerations? What addition to his usual pittance of cents a day is demanded by the soldier who consents to join the forlorn hope,—the little company that must stand in the imminent deadly breach? A handful of silver coin will, at any moment, produce a hundred such heroes. Nay, I dare affirm, that in the happiest communities there are many who, without exhibiting any peculiar tendency to play the desperado in their every-day deportment, would gladly yield up *their lives*, if they could do so, with signal advantage to their families, and credit to themselves. All the care of the rich villain then would be to keep himself rich. This secured, he may be entirely certain that the hour of trial will collect around him a host of willing substitutes. With these views pressing on his mind, the civil magistrate rightly withholds all sanction from a principle, the *occasional* application of which would otherwise be of admirable efficacy.

But, now, will any pretend that the vicarious atonement of the Redeemer is liable to this objection? Is it probable that the astonishing events of Calvary will ever be repeated? Most surely not! *Here* was displayed the infinite wisdom and unbounded foresight of our Father in heaven, that help was laid on one, not only mighty to save, but so *single and unique* in his character, that all hope of forgiveness being obtained in the same way, at a future period, is cut off forever. It was the eternal Son of God, his only begotten, the likeness of his glory, and the express

image of his person, who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death upon the cross. I know, and will not pretend to conceal, the difficulties which beset this subject. I know that the Divinity cannot suffer and die; that the man Jesus was alone the subject of those bitter agonies which were the price of our redemption. But it is impossible to resist the belief that between the suffering, dying man who hung upon the cross, and the glorious Being we adore as the second person of the sacred Trinity, there existed the most close and intimate, though mysterious connection, — a union so complete as to justify our conception of them as one indivisible person. The obscurity of the idea is no argument against the fact. There are many connections of objects in the visible world of whose nature we are wholly ignorant, though we cannot deny their existence; that, for example, between the soul and body. Perhaps, too, the mysteriousness of the union between our Saviour's Godhead and humanity is positively *advantageous*, by arousing the imagination, and giving his sufferings a stronger hold on the intelligent beings for whose instruction they were designed. It is a strange error, into which some have fallen, that an idea cannot make a profound impression unless it be perfectly clear and determinate. Rather the contrary is true. It is the *unsearchable*, *the immeasurable*, *the infinite* which exercise a fascinating power. When an object presents itself to our contemplation too large for our embrace, — to which we can fix no limits, — enveloped in impenetrable obscurity, like boundless space, never ending dura-

tion; above all, the Almighty dwelling in thick clouds and with the majesty of darkness circling round his throne, — then a "fear cometh on us, a trembling maketh our bones to shake;" awe and admiration expel every lighter sentiment; the soul is on the wing, burns to compass the vast unknown, and soars away like an eagle toward heaven, in the strong desire of reaching the heights of its noble argument. How much the idea of God himself owes its elevating character to this principle of our nature, you are all sensible. Perhaps, were we to comprehend him thoroughly, our conception, instead of gaining, would suffer a dreadful loss of grandeur and efficacy. Let us not, then, complain of an obscurity which is permitted to envelop the union of the divine and human natures of our Redeemer for the best designs. The fact is beyond controversy, and the vagueness of our apprehensions renders it more splendidly magnificent; better adapted to be what it really is, the grand central truth of God's wide-extended universe. Seraphim and cherubim find in it an exhaustless theme of wonder and speculation. The impossibility of fathoming the depths of the surpassing mystery only raises their conceptions and rivets their attention on the great lessons which it teaches.

Is it necessary, after all this, to ask whether an atonement by vicarious suffering will soon be repeated? Has God another Son beside his only begotten? or will some angel be commissioned from the seventh heaven to stand between the rebel and his sentence? Vain hope. The substitution of the Eternal Son would never have taken place if that

of an inferior could have been of any avail. Thus, the whole moral family of God has come to the fullest understanding that his last work for redeeming sinners has been accomplished; and that whoever ventures on disobedience, must, hereafter, certainly pay the dreadful forfeit. Great goodness was shown in settling this point by a solemn, decisive spectacle, the import of which could not be mistaken; and who dare call it an idle conjecture, that for every sinner on earth, redeemed by the cross of Christ, there are myriads of stainless immortals who owe their continued loyalty and fidelity to its salutary warning? The sentiment is clearly warranted by Revelation, which assures us that, by Christ, God was pleased, having made peace through the blood of the cross, to reconcile all things to himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven. It is not then surprising that John, in prophetic vision, saw the heavenly armies prostrate before Him that was slain, and joining in the hallelujahs of the redeemed: "And I beheld, and heard the voice of many angels round the throne, and of every creature, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and wisdom, and honor, and glory, and blessing, forever and ever."

It is time to close my remarks. What a view does this subject present of the nature of sin; and what a reproof does it administer to those who would fain believe that the moral disorders of human nature are trifling infirmities, which ought not permanently to separate from God's paternal love! The price

paid for our redemption speaks a very different language. He who was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, took upon him the form of a servant, and died an ignominious, most excruciating, and accursed death. Do you feel a lamentable imperfection in your views on this subject? Do you find, oftentimes, a disposition strong within you (as alas, who does not?) to regard sin with other emotions than those of bitter and deadly hostility? Repair to your Saviour's cross. There you can take the full dimensions of the monster, and in that dying cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" learn how deep the abyss from which you have been delivered.

Secondly. Let us admire the love of God displayed in our redemption. After the account we have given of the doctrine, we may well express surprise at the objection of its enemies, that it makes God an angry creditor, who must be bought off from prosecuting his demands, and who scarcely lays aside his wrath when he has received the uttermost farthing. The sentiment charged upon us we *abhor*, that the Father entertained to us feelings different from those of the benevolent Substitute. All contended for is this simple and perfectly intelligible proposition, that to pardon, without having previously guarded against the dangerous consequences, would have been unbecoming the Ruler of a thousand worlds. There were reasons, in short, why men should *not* be saved, and Jesus Christ has removed them. But these reasons lay in the *nature of things*, not in the temper of Deity. We know that from eternity mercy was in

his heart; and the very expedient, by which remission is harmonized with public justice, originated in his sovereign compassion: "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Away with the fear that the doctrine of redemption will obscure the glory of divine benevolence. That benevolence is its brightest, its most transcendent manifestation.

Finally. Let Christians rejoice in their exalted privileges, and feel the whole force of the motives they supply to live, not unto themselves, but to Him "who loved us, and gave himself for us." What blessedness can compare with that into which you have been introduced by the grace and merit of your Redeemer? Relieved from that load of guilt which was crushing you down to the lowest hell, — at peace with God and having access to him as a Father, — sanctified by the Divine Spirit whom Jesus sends into the hearts of his people, you already have a foretaste of those pure joys which await you above. "All things are *yours*." But remember, too, that you *are Christ's*. He hath redeemed you to himself to be glorified in you and by you. In your love and obedience he enjoys the proper reward of his work, — the reward that was directly in his view when he endured the cross and despised the shame. Will you refuse him this tribute? You dare not, Christian. You dare not. Your soul revolts at the shocking inconsistency, and adopts the expressive language of the apostle: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."

Let this be the language of your practice as well

as of your lips. Endeavor to resemble your Master in all those holy beauties by which his character was distinguished. Abide in him, that when he shall appear, ye may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

The Fulness of Christ.

XV.

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST.

1 *Col.* 1 : 19. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.

HAT we are all, naturally, in a helpless and indigent condition does not admit of denial: at least, the man who can doubt the truth of the proposition must be strangely infatuated. Even as *creatures*, we are entirely dependent on the charity of our Creator, possessing nothing which we can properly call our own,—mere tenants at will, liable every moment to be ejected from what we hold by the most stable tenure. But, to have adequate ideas on this subject, we must take into view *another* fact, attested by the Bible and universal experience —our *sinfulness*. By apostasy we have been separated from the living and exhaustless fountain of good. Like the prodigal, in the parable, we have left our Father's house and wandered into a far country, inflated with chimerical notions of independence and self-sufficiency. Ours, too, has been the prodigal's reward! Reduced, in consequence of our departure, to a horrid famine, we are greedily feeding on base and empty husks,—the sordid, unsatisfying enjoyments of the present world. It is true, all do not feel the pinching want which, "like an armed

man," has come upon them. Like the same prodigal they have fallen into a strange stupor and delirium, which disqualifies them for appreciating the real truth of the case. It is said that in the last stage of famine the sufferer gradually falls asleep, and is entertained with pleasant dreams of costly viands, rich wines, and everything calculated to gratify his appetite. Such is the natural state of sinful men. They imagine they have enough and to spare. They talk of being rich; boast that they are happy. But they *dream;* and if God, in his mercy, does not break the spell which fascinates them before they are arrested by the sleep of death, they shall have a dreadful awakening, when it will be too late to avert the consequences of their delusion.

Accordingly, the first sentiment of a man truly renewed by the grace of the gospel is invariably that of need, absolute, urgent need. No sooner has the unhappy prodigal come to himself than he detects the vile delusion he was under. Instead of rejoicing on a throne, he finds himself a shackled prisoner in a dungeon. Instead of being in need of nothing, he discovers that he is in want of all things. There is a void, and a mighty one, in his immortal spirit, which must be filled up. Without restoration to the favor of God, without likeness to him, without a heart to love and serve him, without the prospect of dwelling forever in his presence, he feels he *cannot* be happy: he acknowledges that he could no more be satisfied with any other blessings than his famished body could be nourished by a dream.

To a person of such sentiments the words of my

text are unspeakably interesting and precious. They are not indeed calculated to make much impression on those who have never been awakened from the sleep of carnal security; for of what consequence to the whole is it that they hear of a physician? For such, the text is neither intended nor suited: "Jesus Christ came to save that which was lost;" "to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance." If there be persons of this character before me, who feel their miserable poverty, who pant after something in the shape of happiness which the world can never give, and who, emptied of all self-confidence, exclaim, from the depths of their destitution, "Lord, help me, for I am poor and needy," we know the fact will rejoice their spirits that "it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell."

The words are at the close of a high eulogy by the apostle on the person and work of his ascended Master. He declares him to be "the image of the invisible God; the first-born of every creature, who was before all things, and by whom all things consist." He speaks of the high honor conferred on him, inasmuch as he is appointed head of the body, the church; and is first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the preëminence; and he sums up the whole by declaring the Father's good pleasure, that "in him should all fulness dwell."

I commence with observing that there is a personal fulness of Divinity which essentially belongs to Christ as the Son of God. This is expressed by the apostle with remarkable emphasis in another part of his writings: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of

the Godhead bodily." There is no attribute of Deity but resides in him as the second person of the adorable Trinity. He is, in his own proper nature and essence, infinitely rich, possessing every divine perfection in the highest possible degree. On examining the sacred page we find them all, without exception, frequently attributed to him; for example, *eternity:* "He is the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, who was, and is, and is to come." He is the *omniscient* One, who "needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." To his omnipotence, the august works of creation and providence sufficiently testify; for by him were all things created that are in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, principalities or powers: "all things were created by him and for him." That omnipresence is his, is proved in his parting promise to his disciples: "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Immutability is his, for he "is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." This, however, is not the idea which the apostle intends to express in the text. His eternal Godhead he possessed *absolutely*, *necessarily*, and *without donation;* in reference to which, therefore, the proposition could not be made, "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." We must observe, at the same time, that this is the true and proper foundation of the other. Were not our Redeemer the mighty God, the everlasting Father, he never would have been capable of receiving that delegated fulness, which qualifies him to be our blessed king and head.

There is a fulness also which belongs to him as Mediator, consisting in his perfect fitness to execute the work on which he came into the world. In his person as God and man, united indissolubly and forever, there is a completeness of qualification to make perfect satisfaction to the divine law. Being man as well as God, he had a human body to offer in sacrifice; for "he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." Being a perfectly holy man, he was fitted to be such a High Priest as became us, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Being God as well as man, his atonement possessed infinite dignity and virtue, and was accepted as a full compensation for the injuries sustained by moral order. Thus, in all respects, he was entirely competent to be a faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

But neither is this the principal thought which the apostle intends to express, though it is contained in his words and is a part of the general idea. The fulness which he mainly refers to is what has been called the *distributive* or *communicative* fulness of the Redeemer: that immense and inexhaustible treasure of saving blessing deposited with him by the Father, to be dispensed to the children of men. It is the high and magnificent prerogative he received when God exalted him to his right hand, of doing all things according to his pleasure in heaven and earth, in behalf of his body, the church. Accordingly, it is said, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath put all things into his hands." As a parent would delegate

to a favorite or only child the entire management of a certain part of his possessions, resigning his own special agency with respect to that part, and appearing only through the other as his agent and representative; so God has made over to Jesus, the Mediator, the great human family, that he may restore it to the happiness which had been forfeited, reunite it to the kingdom of light from which it had been separated, and be the repository of all the good to be enjoyed through time and through eternity. He is the great storehouse in which are hid all the treasures of knowledge, wisdom, and felicity, and from which the redeemed are continually receiving grace for grace. This is the interesting fact referred to principally in my text, and it includes the following particulars: —

The absolute and unrestricted prerogative of gathering sinners into his redeemed family.

A fulness of atoning merit for their justification and pardon.

The possession of all the gifts and influences of the Divine Spirit for their renovation in the image of God.

Light and power for their guidance and defence.

Fulness of glory and blessedness, to be revealed when they shall have finished their earthly course.

First. There is a fulness of ability in Christ to gather sinners into his redeemed family. This he received as an appropriate reward for his fulfilling the stupendous task of our redemption. We cannot suppose that the Son of God would stoop from his eternal throne, assume the form of a servant, and

become a suffering substitute for the guilty, without express provision that he should have power to apply in his own good time the benefits of his purchase to the unhappy rebel. The withholding such a right would have been unjust in the extreme; for might he not do what he would with his own? Having poured out his blood from a generous regard to the good of others, he might well claim the privilege of conferring its healing virtue wherever and on whomsoever it seemed good to his benevolent heart. In accordance with this, it is asserted, "The Son quickeneth whom he will; for the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son." This was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross and despised the shame, — the prerogative of gathering whom he would from every nation and kindred, tongue and people. By virtue of it, he immediately on his resurrection commissioned his servants to go forth and announce salvation to the whole family of man. The whole design of his gospel is to reveal the great truth of his sufficiency to meet the wants of every sinner that hears it. In every page and paragraph we have with more or less directness a free, liberal, unqualified invitation to believe on his name. By the same divine prerogative which originally sent it forth, this gospel has been preserved from century to century, until at length in these ends of the earth it lifts up its cheering voice to the praise of the glorious fulness of Immanuel.

But the right of *offering salvation* is a small part of the prerogative we speak of. He has also the right and ability to *apply it*, — to make a people willing in

the day of his power. There is, if I may use the expression, stored up with him an infinite fund of *convincing and converting grace*, which he employs in the actual gathering of sinners into his redeemed family, translating them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the kingdom of God. One touch of his mighty sceptre softens the hardest heart, breaks the proudest spirit, and subdues to his obedience the most rebellious. However fast the prisoner may be bound with the cords of depravity, these cords are straw in the hands of our heavenly Samson. The highest mountains of opposition become a plain before this illustrious Zerubbabel, when he comes in the chariot of salvation, in the greatness of his power. Let him but pronounce the word, a whole valley of dry bones shall stand up a living and exceeding great army. Only secure his benediction on ordinances, not a heart shall be unpierced; not an eye unfilled with contrition's tear; not a tongue but will exclaim, "What shall I do to be saved?" Blessed Master! only exercise thy divine prerogative, and come down with thy saving power in the midst of us: in the twinkling of an eye these sacred walls will contain a thousand gathered saints.

This is the first specimen we give of the fulness that is in our Redeemer. I trust there are some of us who need no instruction on the subject but that which they have gained from happy personal experience. Let such celebrate with gladness his glorious gathering grace. Let Christ have the entire honor of that wonderful change which has been wrought, as you humbly trust, in your condition and

prospects. *He* did the work, if it ever has been done. His words are spirit, and they are life.

Secondly. There is in him a fulness of righteousness for justification and pardon. The meritorious obedience and satisfaction, rendered by him to the divine law, he keeps in his hands as a sacred fund, the whole of which he bestows on every needy applicant: such being its admirable virtue and power of multiplication, that each possesses it undivided without in the least degree affecting its availableness to others. This righteousness, as to its value, is *infinite*, being the righteousness of a God. It is capable of being imputed, for it is the righteousness of a man. It meets all the exigencies of the case: on the one hand, disarming the curse by the sufferings of its Divine Author on the cross; on the other, honoring the precept by such a wonderful course of obedience without a stain, that infidelity itself is struck dumb at the contemplation of a picture so infinitely transcending all the ideas it had previously formed of a perfect man. The personal character of Jesus was a magnificent orb of light and moral glory, which one dark speck never crossed or blurred, even his enemies being judges; and was crowned with a death so astonishing, in all its attendant circumstances, that not only the throes of inanimate nature, but the voice of humanity itself, speaking by the lips of the Roman centurion, bore testimony to his being the Son of God. Such a phenomenon in the world's history could not but have been designed to exert a *mighty influence on the fates and fortunes of the human race.* God does *nothing in vain;* and from the great-

ness of the effect he produces in a given instance, we may solidly reason to the grandeur of the *design*. It could not have been for a trifling purpose that so wonderful a Being appeared in the midst of us; one who towered so high above his fellows; so evidently allied to the divine, if not (what we know to be the fact) an impersonation of Divinity itself, that we scarcely dare to claim with him community of nature. Look at him as delineated in the narratives of his disciples, and say whether I exaggerate when I affirm that his existence in our dark and degraded world is a miracle equal to that which first ushered the universe into being. I repeat my assertion. The appearance of Jesus Christ could not be for a *trifling purpose*. The all-wise Disposer of events *must* have intended to accomplish by it a result that would be felt through the revolving ages of eternity. What this result is, we are not left, blessed be God! dimly to conjecture. His glorious career merited immortal privileges and honors for the race whose nature he assumed: *that* is it. Hereby a foundation was laid for the blotting-out of sin, and a reëstablishment of happy relations with the offended Sovereign of heaven. With it the great Conservator of moral order has declared himself well pleased, and given the assurance that all who appear in this seamless robe shall be accepted in his sight. Hence it is declared, "He fulfilled all righteousness;" and the heart of every sincere believer echoes, in glad recognition of its truth, "He is the Lord my righteousness." We do not surely mean to be understood as saying, that there is any actual infusion of Christ's

personal holiness into the souls of believers, so that it becomes theirs in the same sense in which their own physical and moral qualities are theirs, — a view of the subject too childish to be seriously entertained, and existing only in the fancy of those who oppose our doctrine; many of them not scrupling to throw odium upon it by the grossest misrepresentation. What we affirm is, the simple and perfectly intelligible truth, that such a moral transfer takes place of what he did and suffered as the great covenant-head of humanity, *to the account of the sinner*, as acquits him from the sentence of condemnation and gives him a title to heavenly blessing. This righteousness is offered to all of Adam's family, and is abundantly sufficient for all. Being of infinite merit, it is exhibited in the gospel as a common benefit, which received by faith never fails in securing all things connected with salvation. That all do not experience its saving efficacy is a melancholy truth; but our Redeemer has himself given the equally melancholy reason: "They *will not* come unto me that they may have life."

From this imputed righteousness proceeds the forgiveness of sin; for "we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins." An act of pardon issues from the courts of heaven, the tenor of which is, "I will be merciful to their iniquities and their sins will I remember no more." To the same purpose are various other expressions of sacred Scripture. Our sins are said to be blotted out, washed away, thrown into the sea, — all of which express in the most forcible manner the complete and

everlasting cancel of guilt through the atoning merit of the Saviour. What an illustrious dispenser of blessing, then, is he in whom we trust! Does he not deserve all the encomiums passed upon him by prophets, apostles, and saints in every age? How adorable that grace which wipes away the stains of our sin as if they had never been; that mercy which speaks to us, rebels as we are, in this tender strain: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

But we have not exhausted the topic. There is more than pardon. There is the privilege of adoption, by which the enfranchised slave is introduced into the family of God, and recognized as no more a servant but a son: — the poor wretch! This also is the gift of Christ; the bestowment of it is expressly asserted to be part of the divine prerogative given by the Father: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." And again, it is said: "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

Thirdly. There is a fulness of grace and vital influence for renovating the soul in the divine image, which had been lost by the apostasy. In other words, *the sanctification* of his people is a most interesting branch of his mediatorial prerogative. Were there no hindrance to communion with God from the guilt of our sins, — were our obnoxiousness to punishment on account of them entirely removed, yet one insurmountable obstuction would still remain: we are *morally polluted;* and Heaven's proclamation has gone forth: "Without holiness no

man shall see the Lord." Jesus Christ, on that memorable hour when he received gifts for men, did not neglect to provide for this emergency. He obtained from the Father the right, not only to make a people willing in the day of his power, but willing in the *beauty of holiness.* Having become their *righteousness*, they next experience him to be their *sanctification.* The *Christ without* now begins to manifest himself as the *Christ within.* In a word, he received the Holy Spirit, by whose agency he presents the church to himself, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing," making it "a holy generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people."

This great work he commences on the day of conversion; breathing into the soul a divine and spiritual vitality, which evinces its presence by corresponding divine and spiritual actings in accordance with his promise: "Because I live ye shall live also." As the precious ointment, on the head of Aaron, is said to have run down to the skirts of his garments, so the oil of gladness, with which our great High Priest was anointed above his fellows, passes over him in rich abundance and quickening efficacy from the head to all the members of the mystical body. He takes away the stony heart, and gives a heart of flesh. He writes in the inner man a new law, — the law of the spirit of life, — which makes free from the law of sin and death. Love to God and the rule of rectitude is now the controlling principle of conduct. Under the influence of this new and delightful sentiment, the subject of it exclaims: "Oh, how love I thy law! I delight in it after the inner man." More-

over, his heart, purged of selfishness, is tenderly affected to all mankind. He rejoices with them that rejoice; he weeps with those that weep, and seeks the best, even the eternal interests of both.

Again; as Christ is the author, so he is the *finisher of our faith*, carrying on the good work he has commenced till the day of redemption. Those spiritual influences which first induced the sinner to turn from his evil ways and live unto God, he continues with him, sometimes more abundantly, at other less, but *never entirely withdrawing* them during his journey heavenward. Are they able to persevere in a good profession through many difficulties? "By him they are kept through faith unto salvation." Do they sometimes wander? He, the good Shepherd, brings them back to the fold. Are they pressed down by a body of sin and death? Victory is given them through the Lord Jesus Christ. Are they buffeted by temptations from without? "His strength is made perfect in weakness." Nay, they are enabled to make constant advances in the divine life. Forgetting the things that are behind, they press forward to the things that are before. Their past failings they subdue, correct the mistakes into which ignorance or precipitance may have plunged them, and from past experience derive lessons for the future. In fine, *all* things necessary to establish, strengthen, and make them perfect in every good word and work, are communicated to them from the plenitude of the Redeemer's grace.

Nothing but this can raise the soul from its pollution and restore the lineaments of heaven. We may

labor for these blessings with untiring effort; but, without union to the living vine, assuredly our labor shall be in vain. It cannot be otherwise. There is *no promise of assistance*, no sanctifying Spirit apart from the Redeemer. There is no kind hand to hold us up in the contest with corruption, to raise us when fallen, and pour oil into our wounds. We are under a stern, inexorable law, that knows only to command. "Do this, and thou shalt live," are the kindest words it is ever heard to utter; and with these must be coupled its other announcement: "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." There is awful *meaning* in this, but no living power to renew the soul. It may *harass* and *frighten* me, and compel me to engage in the external drudgery of religion, but can never inspire holy love, without which obedience is a solemn mockery.

Fourthly. In Christ is light and truth for the guidance of his people. Among the dismal effects of our apostasy, not the least is the almost brutal ignorance in which our race is plunged on subjects of the deepest and most commanding interest. There is, indeed, a species of knowledge in which great advances have been made, and to which we would award due praise. In reference to our earthly condition and the improvement of the conveniences of living, its value is great. Yet, what a *poor*, *abject*, *worthless* thing is secular science, carried to the highest point of cultivation, when brought to bear on our higher nature as moral agents, and our eternal destination! What instruction does it communicate con-

cerning the great Being who made us? What, concerning the method of securing his favor? What, concerning the proper end of our existence? What, concerning our future immortality? On all these subjects it makes no pretensions to be our guide. It cannot even save us from the *abyss of atheism*, as too many facts painfully demonstrate. Yes! human science can look up into the heavens, and expound the movements of those shining orbs that roll their ceaseless round through the void immense. But its dim eye sees little more than *matter in perpetual agitation*, — an eternal whirl of senseless atoms jostling each other as they blindly rush through fields of ether, and assuming new forms, as chance or fate determine; while the *intelligent Author* of all the order and beauty they exhibit is so faintly recognized that it has been known to *doubt his personal existence*, and resolve the proofs of his ever-present energy into a blind, mechanical necessity. Let one example suffice: "I DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE HYPOTHESIS OF A DEITY," deliberately asserts the most commanding intellect of ancient or modern times; the man who, carrying out the conceptions of Newton, has given a complete system of the physical universe, pushing demonstration to such a dizzy height that the profoundest mathematician pants in the mere attempt to follow him in his magnificent course. "*I do not believe in the hypothesis of a Deity*," says the illustrious La Place, in the preface to his immortal work. Yes; after erecting the proudest monument of the strength of human intellect ever exhibited to the eyes of men, — after exerting a power of genius

almost divine in explaining the wonderful mechanism of nature, — this demigod of science calmly sits down and acknowledges (O most lame and impotent conclusion!) that "he does not believe in the hypothesis of a Deity." Incredible and horrible as this may seem, it is the fact; and I cite it as a specimen of the thick darkness that broods over the natural mind till enlightened by grace, and which all the lights of science, so far from dissipating, seem only to render, in many cases at least, tenfold more terrific.

But, blessed be God! we are not left to the blank despair that would overspread the soul had we no other clue through the mazes of our condition than the teachings of human science. There is a sun in the moral firmament, and Jesus Christ is that sun. "I am the light of the world," he declares; "he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Being constituted by God his visible representative and the interpreter of his will, treasures of true wisdom, of sublime and exalted knowledge, are hid in him. Perfectly acquainted with all the thoughts and purposes of the Father (for he lay from eternity in his bosom, and was fitted therefore to reveal all that was in his heart), he has communicated out of the fulness of his knowledge as much as mankind need to the possession of true happiness in the present world, and everlasting felicity in the next, which he has embodied in that most blessed of all books, the Bible: for the spirit which moved holy men of old, they received from him, the Great Prophet, — "the Angel of

the Covenant," who is set forth to be a "light to the Gentiles, a salvation to the ends of the earth." He alone has confirmed and sealed the fundamental doctrine of one God and Parent of all, — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: for "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten of the Father, he hath declared him." He alone has informed us of the true origin of the world, delineated the happy condition of primeval man, and accounted for the entrance of sin into this fair universe. He alone has unfolded the depravity of the human heart in all its terrible depth; awakened the world from its deceitful dreams, and told of high Heaven's controversy with it. He alone has announced a remedy, and brought life and immortality to light. But he does more than this. He not only teaches, but *applies* his instructions, making them effectual, and impressive, so that they penetrate the soul, shedding over it a *warming*, *captivating* influence which it cannot resist, and yet to which it sweetly and spontaneously yields. The darkened understanding becomes light in the Lord, the deaf are compelled to hear, and the blind cannot choose but see clearly. Though he does not always make his people wise in the sense attached to wisdom by the world, he makes them wise in God's meaning of it, — wise unto salvation; for "Unto them it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." He teaches them the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness. He so instructs them in principles of duty, in the divine art of happy living, that they are enabled to avoid every snare, extricate themselves from every embarrassment that threatens

their comfort, and walk in a perpetual sunshine. Often does the Christian, perplexed as to the course which in a given instance he should pursue, hear his guiding voice behind him, saying, "This is the way, walk thou in it," with such distinctness and evidence of reality that he can scarce resist the impression that it falls on his bodily ear.

Sitting at the feet of such an Instructor, he can afford to be ignorant of many things, the knowledge of which is coveted by not a few as the perfection of wisdom. He may be a babe in the modern astronomy, yet he walks among the stars for all that. When he looks up to the magnificent canopy above his head, he can answer questions which the far-reaching intellect of a La Place could not. "Who created all these; who brought out their host by number; who calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, not one faileth." He may have never heard of the existence of Saturn's ring, nor calculated the motions of a comet, nor conjectured the distance of the nearest fixed star, nor philosophized on telescopic nebulæ; but he has a science that laughs to scorn such pitiful speculations; that soars beyond planets, suns, and systems piled on systems, turning its back on the most distant orb that twinkles on the verge of created being, nor drops its wing till, arrived at the eternal throne, it nestles in the uncreated effulgence of the Godhead. He may have no acquaintance with mineralogy, or fossils, — possibly may stare on being told that one stone of our muddy planet differs from another. But this cannot seriously discompose the man to whom Christ has given the "new

stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it." He may be no chemist, but he is a profound *alchemist;* for he has the art of transmuting everything he touches into gold. He may show very little scholarship in talking of the furniture of the house; but he is the bosom-friend and intimate of the Master, which argues a higher wisdom, as well as nobler dignity. He may boast of few books, and his library be as scanty as his wardrobe; but one volume he possesses from whose constant study he derives a lore, compared with which, the whole cyclopedia of science is a vast continent of impertinency, worthless as the dirt beneath his feet. We admire the stupendous folios to which the erudition of a single man has given birth. But there is more learning, truth, eloquence, and lofty intellect in the short broken prayer of a poor old woman, who, though unable to write her name, keeps herself in daily communion with her Saviour, than in all the mountains of blotted paper that load the shelves of the Bodleian library. "What are you repeating so often?" inquired a literary gentleman of his ignorant, but pious servant-maid, who was continually reciting her prayers while engaged in her domestic avocations. "The Lord's prayer," she replied. "But the Lord's prayer is very short," he rejoined; "you can soon finish that." "Yes, sir," was her answer; "but I *always begin again!* O master, what ideas of the power, wisdom and goodness of my God are shut up in those four single words,—our Father, who art in heaven." What think you of this poor girl? Was she not a fine scholar? Was she not

qualified to open an academy which many a gowned professor might have attended with infinite advantage? But so it is and ever will be. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," exclaims our Redeemer, "because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Fifthly. There are in Christ inexhaustible resources for preserving and defending the objects of his saving grace. This necessarily follows from his solemn inauguration to the office of king of Zion. For being anointed Prince of Peace and head over all things to the church, he must possess the amplest qualifications for the high duties of his function; one and not the least of which is the protection of his subjects. Otherwise he would be *no king*. He would be one of those poor phantoms of royalty, who bear the name and hold the diadem, while on account of their real insignificance they are objects of general pity and contempt. But Christ is truly *and in the fullest sense a monarch*, having all power given him in heaven and in earth. Though his bodily presence is withdrawn from us, his eye runs to and fro through creation; his right arm circles the universe, and every subject of his gracious rule is kept in the hollow of his hand. He has an *army, too!* At his side stands a countless host of burning angels, listening to the voice of his word, ready at his nod to wing their rapid flight for the protection of his people and the discomfiture of aliens. So exact and minute is the superintendence which he exercises, that not a hair of our head falls to the ground without a permis-

sive edict: such its *extent*, that the follower of the cross, banished to the remotest desert or shivering amid Arctic snows, is as safe as if he were already singing the new song before the throne; such its *perpetuity*, that not one has been lost.

How illustriously did he display this power in the defence of his infant church! Launched a feeble bark, with the most helpless and timid of crews, on a stormy sea, it gallantly made its way through the rocks and billows that every moment threatened its destruction; proving by its miraculous preservation that an omnipotent pilot was at the helm, whom even the winds and waves obeyed; who, if he sometimes seemed to sleep, always awoke in the *hour of greatest peril*, and commanded them, "Peace; be still." It has now expanded into a large and stately *ark*, filled with ten thousand times ten thousand happy spirits plucked from the raging waters, and is gently sailing down the river of life, receiving from day to day new myriads of redeemed from every nation and kindred and tongue and people. All the agitations of states and empires have been made subservient to its interests. Dynasties have risen and fallen, like the leaves of autumn; nations have passed on and off the scene of action; the church, the frail, apparently helpless church, like the bush in Horeb burning but not consumed, has survived *them all*, and continues to subsist with increasing glory, a monument of the faithfulness and efficiency of its Divine Protector. We have reason to believe, however, that the greatest exhibition of these attributes is yet to come. A period is approaching, when his

sceptre shall not be limited by the paltry boundaries which at present confine it to a small portion of the habitable globe; but extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Enemies shall be prostrated; kings who will refuse to be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to the church, shall be hurled from their seats of greatness, and all the nations of the earth shall coalesce in one kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. That the course of events in the world does not immediately promise such an issue, — that numerous and in the view of reason unenlightened by faith *appalling* difficulties are in the way, — we concede freely. "But who art thou, O great mountain? Before the conquering Immanuel thou shalt become a plain; and he will bring forth the headstone with shoutings, crying Grace, grace unto it!" "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Here is the true foundation on which rest all our hopes of an amelioration of the condition of our race. You read and hear much in our day of the astonishing improvements of the age, the march of science and the arts, the decay of ancient prejudices, the progress of free institutions, the dissemination of intelligence among all classes of society. Progress! You are reminded of the wonderful achievements of the press, the steam-engine, the spinning-jenny. You are told that the *schoolmaster is abroad.* In short, we are invited to believe that we are on the eve of a great *philosophical millennium*, which will more than realize the fondest dreams of the poet and the sage

concerning the perfectibility of man! *Dreams* I have called them. *Dreams* they truly are and will continue to be till our great globe shall cease to roll. They overlook a solemn and momentous fact, never to be lost sight of in speculations concerning the perfectibility of man, because it solves the problem, *at once and forever, in the negative*,— the innate and radical depravity of the human soul, which no external agency can reach, and which, we have reason to fear, will only assume more portentous forms of mischief as the intellect is developed. Will any man soberly assert that the onward movement of our utilitarian age is to a higher spiritual life, to a purer morality, to a more ardent love of truth, to more earnest aspirations after the good, the beautiful, the divine? Standing, as we are, in the midst of the agitated and heaving mass, it would, perhaps, be unwise to predict, with confidence, the issue. But one thing is certain, that there is little promise of a result that will satisfy the philanthropist. The prospect may be, that a new cycle in the affairs of men is approaching; but we sadly mistake the omens that meet us on every side, if it be not a cycle of *gigantic wickedness*, purged, indeed, of the grossness of bygone ages, — smooth, plausible, brilliant as the hue of the serpent, — disguising its turpitude by refinements unknown to our simple forefathers, but surpassing all former iniquity in its utter destitution of principle and its corrupting tendencies.

There is but one hope for us, and that is the hope of the blessed Gospel. *We are a race redeemed by Christ.* The seal of a high predestination is upon

us, and the Mighty One entrusted with its execution is already seated at the Father's right hand. "I saw," says the inspired seer, wrapt in mystic vision, "one like the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven; and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." *That is it!* Meanwhile, and till the period of fulfilment, he permits his future domain to be the subject of an endless variety of experiments, whose shameful and disastrous issue will enhance the splendor of his final triumph. *He bides his time*, and when the appointed moment arrives, *woe* to the worm that stands up to oppose his progress!

Lastly; there is in Christ a communicative fulness of glory and happiness, which he bestows on his redeemed when the conflicts and trials of the present life are ended. As all power is given him in heaven as well as earth, we cannot doubt that those whom he loved here below he will introduce into the mansions of the upper house. This is delightfully expressed in the assurance given by him to John in the first Apocalyptic vision: "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead and am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death." Our translation has unhappily rendered the passage in a way that greatly detracts from its force and beauty. When we hear the Redeemer asserting that he has the keys of *hell* and death, we can scarce avoid supposing him to have the custody only

of the place of torment, — the right and power of executing on the impenitent the sentence of eternal justice. But this is not the meaning of the expression. It cannot be; for where would be the sweet comfort of the statement, or the appropriateness and point of the argument? There seems little propriety in encouraging the apostle "not to fear," when all the reason assigned is, that Christ is the jailer of devils, — the dread janitor of the bottomless pit. The word translated "hell," should not have been so translated. It denotes the invisible world in general, — the whole condition of departed spirits, — the place of eternal happiness as well as that of eternal misery and despair. Of both these great compartments, *he* hath the keys; in other words, the entire disposal; and the passage has special reference to the former. The portals of the celestial kingdom are committed to him, which he opens and no man can shut, — shuts and no man can open. In connection with this, *another* key is given him, the *key of death*. The time and all the circumstances of this solemn event are put into his hands, and arranged by him with the utmost accuracy. He stands at the sick-bed of the dying saint, sustains his sinking courage in the terrible conflict; at the proper moment gives the signal of dismission, when a band of angels transport him to the heavenly city which, by virtue of the same divine prerogative, opens its golden gates, through which the enraptured spirit enters; all heaven ringing with welcome and joyful acclamation. Accordingly, we hear the Redeemer, in his last intercessory prayer, addressing his Father on this subject

with all the confidence of one who knew that he was possessed of this wonderful dominion. "Father, *I will.*" Mark the emphasis, I was about to say the tone of high command, with which he urges his petition. He uses not the language of entreaty, nor betrays the least consciousness that by any possibility the prayer might be denied. It is the Lord of the quick and dead who speaks, reminding the Father of his covenant rights. It is the great Mediator with the keys of the invisible world at his girdle: "Father, *I will*, that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

Such is a brief sketch of the fulness that dwells in the Lord Jesus Christ. Allow me to conclude with some remarks by way of improvement.

We here see the important place in the Christian system that is occupied by the Redeemer. Is it so, that he, in his mediatorial character, is the *repository* of all blessings for the children of men? Has it pleased the Father that in him should *all fulness dwell?* Then, the church will never gain by a *Christless Christianity*, and all endeavors to impress on it such a character will be as prejudicial to immortal souls, as it is insulting to the divine Author of this constitution. He is the *life;* the animating, controlling, central principle of Bible theology; and what the body is without the soul, that religion is without him as the Alpha and Omega. He is the only medium through which we can see God and live. By his blood we are purchased, by his Spirit regenerated, by his grace sanctified, preserved, glorified.

No wonder, then, that the Holy Scriptures dwell

on Christ. No wonder that, when he is the theme, the harp of the sweet singer of Israel sends forth its most ravishing notes, and his tongue becomes as the pen of a ready writer. No wonder that we hear such language as this from the lips of Paul: "For me to live is Christ; yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Nothing, indeed, strikes so forcibly, in the writings of this great apostle, as the deep, heartfelt delight with which he expatiates on the glory, the beauty, the loveliness, and preciousness of his Saviour's character. Truly has it been said, "Christ is the gospel's sum, substance, end, and all. Without Christ, the gospel has no meaning. Of all riddles, it is the most perplexing; of all impositions, it is the most deceptive. It is a cloud without water, a shadow without substance, a *body without a soul!*"

Unhappily, there are not a few who, without formally disavowing their belief in Christianity, seem to have no love or esteem for this, its fundamental truth. They do not understand, they say, why God should convey his blessings to us through the medium of another. They prefer dealing with the great Parent himself, — expecting everything from his benignity, — and will not dishonor him by supposing that he needs an almoner to distribute his fatherly bounty, or an intercessor to disarm him of his wrath. Bold and wicked language, betraying the grossest ignorance of the ways of God and their own character! Is it not a fact that, in communicating his blessings, he has *always employed* intermediate agency? What comfort or privilege do we enjoy

that we did not receive from some one to whom the trust is delegated of bestowing it? Our parents, are they not almoners, appointed to nurse, feed, clothe, defend, and educate us, — by whose tender cares we are fitted to act our part in life, and perform similar duties to those who come after us? Are we not indebted, every hour and moment of our lives, to the good offices of others? Could we *live* without our fellow-beings? What would become of us in a single day, if, under the absurd pretext of receiving favors directly from the hand of God, we rejected their assistance. Poverty, disease, and wretchedness in every form, would soon bring down our haughty spirits, and make us thankfully betake to the earthly fountains in which Heaven has deposited its mercy. In precisely the same way has God always administered the concerns of his redeemed church. When he delivered Israel from Egypt, and organized it into a nation, it was *by his servant Moses*, whom the people were commanded to hear on pain of exclusion from covenant blessings. When he healed the bites of the poisonous animals that wrought destruction through their camp, it was by means of a *brazen serpent*, erected on a pole before the eyes of the whole congregation. When he rescued his people from invading enemies, it was by *judges and illustrious warriors*, whom he raised up for the purpose, whose hearts he filled with invincible courage, and whose efforts he crowned with victory. And shall we question God's right to establish a similar arrangement, so harmonizing with all his other dealings in relation to our immortal interests? Shall we refuse to honor

his own Eternal Son in whom all the Father shines; united to us, as he is, by the possession of the same human nature, and having all the tender sympathies of an elder brother? I say, shall we dare to pour contempt on this magnificent ordinance of salvation because it is our particular desire that no medium interpose between us and the uncreated Godhead?

Alas! you know not what you ask, nor what spirit you are of. You cannot see the great and terrible God in his absolute majesty, and *live*.

Equally impossible is it to yield obedience to the divine will without such an intervention. Men have *attempted* it. They have sought, by refined speculation on the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice, assisted by motives based on the ideas of everlasting punishment and reward, to acquire that state of moral affection which is pleasing in the sight of God. But they have never succeeded. Their loftiest flights have always terminated in utter discomfiture. The more they attempted to dam up the mighty fountain of corruption, the higher it rose and the more dreadful was the inundation that followed. *Man is dead in sin!* Deserted by the spirit of life, given up to his own sordid and earthly impulses, he may, by a spasmodic and desperate effort, succeed in performing a few external acts which shall possess a certain appearance of moral worth. But they are *apples of Sodom and grapes of Gomorrah;* fair and promising to the eye, while worms and rottenness are at the core. Nothing but the transforming energy of the grace of Christ can make free from the law of sin and death. It is the *cross* alone, that can crucify the

world, and by which the world is crucified to us. From the sacred Victim, whom it exhibits to the eye of faith, flows a stream, not only of blood, but pure living water, that washes all our stains away, and fits for angelic joys. Look at the experience of the holy and blessed Paul. Who exceeded him in earnest endeavors to obtain a righteousness which should approve itself to an enlightened conscience while stranger to the faith of the gospel. He struggled with sin as *with a demon*, — fasted, prayed, attended, with painful scrupulosity, to every Levitical observance, — neglected no expedient that promised a successful issue. In the days of his youthful thoughtlessness, he flattered himself that his labor was not entirely in vain. But when the commandment came, when the holy law began to speak in thunder, and its lightnings flashed on his awakened religious sensibility, he found that he had been the victim of a terrible delusion. To use his own expressive language, "Sin revived and I died." The description he gives of this unhappy contest, in the seventh chapter of the Romans, is one of the most graphic and thrilling narratives ever penned. "O wretched man!" he exclaims, at the close, "who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" He seems utterly exhausted. His breast heaves with unutterable agony, and he is on the point of breathing his last sigh, when, behold the sign in the heavens — his Saviour's cross! Instantly, the darkness breaks away, he feels the sweet and serene breathings of the Holy Ghost, infusing new life in every faculty, — penetrating, warming, exalting him, — letting heaven itself into his soul, and he

cries out with a burst of triumph, wondering at the change he has experienced, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ my Lord."

Try the expedient of this glorified spirit. Try it, thou conscience-burdened sinner, trembling at the thought of appearing before a just God, and anxiously casting about for a righteousness to cover thee in his presence. Try it, thou anxious spirit, who, feeling the necessity of a far higher reach of holiness than any hitherto attained, art seeking for it as for hid treasure; though, alas, condemned to perpetual disappointment. Soon the clouds shall disappear, and thou shalt settle down in the calm peace of faith. Oh, the blessedness of looking unto Jesus, away from every other hope! What a delightful sense of security fills the mind! What confidence before God! What alacrity in duty! What unshaken courage in the hour of danger! What triumph in death! It is this, and nothing but this, that can carry us through the billows of Jordan. In that solemn hour, when the world, with all its vain illusions, fades from the view, when eternity is on the point of unveiling its awful secrets, when the thought presses heavy on the spirit, how shall I stand before the dread Being whom I have so often offended? — we shall all feel the unutterable preciousness of the fact that there is a Daysman between us and offended justice. "What are you doing?" said a clerical brother to a pious and venerable clergyman whom he visited on his death-bed. "What am I doing?" replied the gasping but rejoicing saint. "I will tell you what I am doing, brother. I am gathering together all

my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, all my ill deeds, and I am going to throw them all overboard, and swim to glory *on the plank of free grace.*" The good old man knew the secret of his strength.

The Consideration of Death.

XVI.

THE CONSIDERATION OF DEATH.

Deut. 32: 29. That they would consider their latter end.

THESE words are part of the final address of Moses to the Israelites, whom he had assembled to receive his parting benediction. He knew the levity and deceitfulness of their hearts. From a thousand facts which had occurred before his eyes, he knew that they would in a short time apostatize from the Lord, and draw down his burning displeasure. While, therefore, he tenderly blesses them, he intermingles the most affecting warnings and admonitions.

It is highly probable that the exhortation before us does not immediately relate to the death of individuals, but to the fates and fortunes of the nation at large, on which he had been discoursing in the previous context. Yet it will bear the former interpretation, and we do no violence to Scripture in making this view the basis of our intended remarks. Doubtless it was in the mind of the venerable legislator as well as the other. He had just received the intimation that his departure was at hand, and hourly expected the call. Suspended thus between life and death, realizing the vanity of the former, the cer-

tainty and awfulness of the latter, with what yearnings of heart must he have regarded the immense multitude spread before him at the foot of the eminence where he stood! Each was like himself, immortal, — each like himself naked to the arrows of the king of terrors. They were his brethren; the bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh; yet they were spending their precious hours in a round of idle gayety and folly, dancing on the brink of destiny, without sending a thought beyond the present moment. Filled with pity and alarm, we may suppose that he breaks forth into the exclamation, "Oh that they were wise that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

This is a subject which concerns you all. I have nothing to say upon it that is new, but much that is calculated to be practically useful, and of which you ought frequently to be reminded. The truths which have been uttered a thousand times and have become mere household words by repetition, are precisely those which we are in greatest danger of forgetting. Nor does their perfect self-evidence mend the matter. On the contrary, it seems to render them more inoperative; for whose heart palpitates under the enunciation of an axiom? Thus it often happens, I doubt not, that preachers, having to a reasonable extent the confidence of their congregations, find it easier to indoctrinate them in all the mysteries of the Athanasian creed, than convince them, as they ought to be convinced, that two and two make four.

We will show, in the first place, what is signified by considering our latter end.

Second, the wisdom of so doing; in other words, point out the benefits that will accrue from such an employment of our thoughts.

As to the signification of the text, it means in general a habit of serious thoughtfulness on the termination of life, as opposed to that unreflectiveness of character, that butterfly volatility incapable of looking back to the past or forward to the future, which prevail so extensively. To consider a thing is to examine it with care, studying its causes, properties, and effects, turning it over for this purpose from side to side, viewing it in one light and then another, till we have got a complete acquaintance with it; and this is the consideration here. It denotes more than a casual thought extorted by an incident to be soon forgotten, and the thought along with it. There must be a habit, a course of reflection. We will frequently bring the subject near, as a man would something at a distance to ascertain what it is. We will investigate its origin, its import, not only that lying on the surface, but its deeper meaning, if it has any, and its probable bearings on our happiness and misery. More particularly we will view it as God's penalty on transgression, as most certain, all its circumstances predetermined, perhaps near; and lastly, as the end of moral trial and the commencement of eternal retribution.

I. They who duly consider their latter end see in it God's penalty on transgression. It is an amazing folly of men which accepts the belief that death, as we now find it, is nothing more than a physical event, a simple phenomenon necessarily springing

from the laws of organic being. To say that a man has died is, according to this philosophy, tantamount to saying that a leaf fell from a tree on a bleak morning in November. There are, indeed, some grains of truth in the view, which it is worth while to separate from the falsehood, that science may be not suspected of lending its countenance to a superficial infidelity. That the present body was not designed to be the soul's permanent residence is demonstrable from its frailty, the grossness of its functions, and its evident subjection to all the laws of animal life. Nor was the case different with our first parents in Paradise. Their corporeal organization was temporary, intended for a temporary condition. The race that was to spring from their loins God designed to exist not simultaneously, but by succession, one generation coming and another going, till its collective destiny should be consummated by elevation to a higher domain of life and felicity. The dissolution of the body, therefore, viewed as a physical fact, is not the effect of apostasy, but the operation of a great law of change, originally impressed like the law of propagation. In this sense man is born to die, as he is to live. However Adam might have exceeded his nine hundred years, a change would come at last, and he would have been exalted to a loftier place in the city of God, by a process fully equivalent to physical death. His body would have been given to the elements; the earths and gases which compose it would have returned to the vast storehouse of nature from which they had been temporarily borrowed, to enter again into new forms of life, and thus

carry out the scheme of Providence that the earth be filled with inhabitants.

But while we cheerfully concede thus much, we must observe that the change adverted to is a small part of what we now call death. Doubtless had man remained innocent, it would have been accompanied with every circumstance calculated to make it a blessing instead of a curse. The benignant Father would have put his children to sleep in the evening of their earthly day, in a way so gentle as to be itself a happiness. They would have fallen, like ripe fruit from the tree, with no other marked sensation than a consciousness of growing weakness, which would have reconciled them to their departure, and even made it welcome. Disease, in aggravated and malignant forms, would have been unknown; the gracious presence of God have been felt; no accusing conscience would have been there, nor would the terrors of a dark futurity have gathered round the dying couch, turning the most simple and harmless of natural events into the most horrible of calamities. It is this, — the *moral* aspect which sin has given the last struggle of nature, — it is its ghastly accompaniments that constitute what Scripture and the common language of mankind call *death*. Whatever it once was, — the friend, the benefactor of man, the angel of peace, that by a gentle kiss, or a breathing, light as the sleeping infant's, parted the happy spirit from its clay tenement to seek an eternal building in the heavens, — most certainly it was very different from what we see every day around us.

Is there not a curse in the last? Can any one

deny it, who has ever seen a death-bed, or a funeral? Why (to amplify a little) has a benevolent Deity, whose goodness reigns over all his other works, been pleased to emancipate his noblest and best from mortal shackles by a process calling up so many dismal ideas? Death! There is something freezing in the very sound. Nature shudders at the thought, at the most distant prospect of it. And no wonder! It is not a mere bugbear deriving its terrors from a cowardly imagination. What tremendous precipices to be passed over in going down to the dreary valley! Here an accumulation of agonizing pains, — weary days, and groaning, sleepless nights; there the sinking of the heart, the utter desolation of soul known only to the one that feels it when told that all hope is gone. But after being fairly entered the jaws of (sheol) the monster, who can tell how tremendous the passage through? Some of our friends may have descended to the portals and returned again rehearsing the trials they have encountered; but none who passed beyond have been so courteous as to revisit us and blab the secret of their journey. The information can be got only from experience. To know, we must feel the shock which tears asunder soul and body, and separates from every present enjoyment. The sun withdraws his blessed light and is eclipsed forever; the moon and the fair stars are blotted out; the genial influences of spring are no more felt; the fragrance of summer no more gladdens. Our bodies are wrapped up, boxed and cast into a pit as things too offensive for God or man to look at. Our dearest friend, when he undertakes to press on our cold

cheek the last kiss of love, turns away loathing. Already, before obtaining our final resting-place, we are a prey to putrefaction. Every tie that binds us to the living is dissolved. Parents leave their children, children their parents; husbands their wives, wives their husbands; and the laceration of these bonds, with what untold agony does it fill the earth!

And is all this, combined with what is infinitely worse and never to be overlooked, an accusing conscience, a sense of guilt, and a dark foreboding of the future, a mere law of physics; a simple, natural phenomenon like the flux of the tides; the rising and setting of the stars; the reproduction and decay of vegetables? Do not believe it. Scout the senseless absurdity, and listen in devout humility to that Holy Book which gives the true solution, the only philosophy that expounds the awful mystery of the subject. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In this light you must always contemplate your latter end. You must view it as in itself a melancholy thing, as God's curse on man, — his deep burning brand on the traitor who dared to lift his puny arm against Omnipotence.

The neglect of this view accounts for the little importance which many attach to death, in seeming at least, for the hardihood with which they encounter it, though confessedly destitute of a religious hope. Such cases are not rare. How often do we see the man of abandoned wickedness remaining such to the last, expiring with blasphemy on his tongue! The apparent frequency — more apparent than real how-

ever — of such exhibitions almost tempts superficial observers to doubt the necessity of religion, to ask, "If the ungodly man can prance so gallantly to his end, of what use are its sublime consolations. Without them it is plain I can live, and without them it seems equally plain I can die." The objection is easily answered: a mighty distinction is overlooked. It is a very different thing for a man to die with his eyes shut and his eyes open; to die stupidly ignorant of what he is doing, and to die with a full appreciation of its solemn import. The former is the character of the persons referred to. They have never seriously considered the subject; they are strangers to the moral physiology of death, and hence they can view it, in prospect at least, with what the world thinks admirable firmness.

The reflection, however, cannot but occur to a thoughtful spirit, that, after all, this is not a desirable state of things. Surely those are not to be envied whose courage is in the direct ratio of their ignorance, and would ooze out from their fingers' ends at the entrance of a little light. We would hardly call the idiot a hero who, ignorant of the nature and effects of firearms, would rush on the exploding cannon. True heroism consists in serenity of mind, accompanied with a *full consciousness of danger;* and, therefore, the Christian is the only hero, because he only meets the last enemy with smiles, recognizing that *he is* an enemy. As for those bold defiances of the ungodly, their bravadoes, be it remembered, are heard only at the beginning of the contest; they have no opportunity to inform us what discoveries of

comparative strength take place before its close. One thing is certain, that the men who boast they fear it not, know it not. Like the simple child, bearding the Numidian lion in his lair, they have no conception of the terribleness of their enemy, till irrecoverably in his grasp. We have read, or heard somewhere, the observation, that, after receiving a mortal wound in battle, the last hours of those noted for their dashing gallantry are frequently not in keeping with the gay hardihood displayed a short time before. The great poet's description of Cæsar in a fever, crying out like a sick girl, is often verified. Bodily prostration will, in part account for it, but not entirely; for the delicate female and feeble old age have, in similar circumstances, evinced a beautiful calmness and self-possession. The truth is, the fire-eating courage which wins such golden opinions from men is that of the well-fed animal rather than of the mind, and, therefore, the whole charm dissolves at the loss of a little blood. More than all, a new light is suddenly let into the soul; it begins to feel itself in the true world, — no longer the phantom world, the world of vain illusion: there is an overwhelming consciousness of being in the presence, not of a phenomenon, but a stern messenger of Heaven, enforcing the penalty of a violated law.

In the second place, we should consider our latter end as one of those inexorable certainties which it would be sheer idiocy to doubt. From the upper chancery, sentence has gone forth against all the children of Adam. The other edicts of Omnipotence have been violated, but this is proof against trans-

gression. The hardest sinner yields it exemplary obedience. In other wars, the infant, the aged, the feeble-minded, are exempted. But no discharge here. The death-field is strewn, in equal profusion, with the bones of the child a span long and the magnificent warrior who filled the world with his renown. The youth and veteran lie together. The form, admired by every eye and sung by many a tongue, is quietly stretched beside haggard age. Friends, foes, parents, children, master and servant, ministers and hearers, physicians and patients, teachers and students, meet on common ground, forgetting their previous sympathies, antipathies, and relations: —

> "What is this world?
> What but a spacious burial-field unwalled,
> Strewed with death's spoils?
> The very turf on which we tread, once lived;
> And we that live, must lend our carcasses
> To cover our own offspring."

These are truths which no one pretends to gainsay. But I must observe that the consideration to which our text invites us implies more than assent to them. *We must lay them to heart.* Ah, here is the difficult point! It is an easy thing to acquiesce in the general maxim, and say, with a sentimental shrug and contraction of the eyebrow, "All must die." But it is not so easy to bring the fact home to our bosom. Men do not like to reflect on it with any closeness, and therefore put it far off; as if heedlessness would render certainty a little less certain.

The mind seems, in this respect, endowed with a strange power; a power of closing its eyes on the

most eminent evils, — looking right away from objects the sight of which give it uneasiness. There are men who could preserve a good degree of cheerfulness with the certainty of being in a few days tortured at the stake, provided there was a preponderance of chances in favor of its not taking place *to-morrow*. In some respects it is a happy constitution. Where vivid anticipations of the future have no connection with present duty, nor with preparation for that future, the indulgence of them is morbid, only tending to make us miserable before the time. But, surely, it is the very folly of the moon to put far from us the certainties of to-morrow, when bringing them near would have the best influence on the conduct of to-day. Yet so act the most. Like persons on the verge of bankruptcy, they will not inspect the books that give the proof of it. They are like a heap of pismires, so intent on hoarding their paltry grains, that they do not see the foot lifted up to crush them and their possessions. This folly you will avoid if you obey the injunction of the text. You will consider your latter end as certain; you will frequently think of it as such, as something that stands right in your path, and must be encountered. Especially you will avoid that rock of perdition to thousands, the idea that it is at an indefinite distance. Life at best is short, and liable every moment to be cut shorter still, by disease and accident. Every pain, therefore, you feel, every disorder, however trifling, should be interpreted as a knock at the door, by the officer who is to enforce a writ of ejectment, — as a signal for striking tent, and preparing to cross the Jordan.

Again, thirdly, as death is certain, so we are called on to consider that the time with all the circumstances is predetermined, however to human appearance casual. We have a striking example of this in Moses himself, the author of the text. To avoid the bloody edict of Pharaoh, he is cast, when newly born, into the river, to die by an easy death. But he *cannot* die. The daughter of Pharaoh rescues and adopts him as her son. His conduct exposes him to the infuriate enmity of the whole Egyptian nation,—the child of destiny cannot yet die. Thousands and ten thousands of the people, indeed all except two or three, bleach with their bones the wilderness through which he led them to the land of promise. He bears a charmed life; at length comes to the land of Moab,—ascends Mount Nebo, and there dies, "*according to the Word of the Lord.*" The cruel Ahab, to avoid the fate predicted, that where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, they should perform the same office for him, enters the field of battle in disguise: "A Syrian archer," we are informed, "drew his bow at a venture and smote him between the joints of the harness: so the king died and the dogs licked his blood, according to the word of the Lord." Repeatedly did the Jews attempt the death of our Redeemer; but his hour being not yet come, their efforts proved abortive. Time rolls on; at length the season arrives, and Jesus expires, at the ninth hour, in the city of Jerusalem, according to the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

Equally true is it that to all of us there is an appointed time on earth; that our days are as the

days of a hireling. What an interesting thought! In God's Book is registered, with minutest accuracy, every breath we draw, every action we perform, till we enter the silent land. *He counts the beats of our pulse.* To the man of piety there is nothing offensive in this doctrine. On the contrary, it is as precious to his heart as its truth is nearly self-evident to his understanding. He feels no trembling at the thought of being in the hands of God; no regrets that when he leaves the world he is not called to erect his last altar to *chance*, that most forlorn of all substitutes for God ever devised by human folly.

Fourthly. Another point we should consider is, that we can only die once. If a man die, shall he live again? Having departed, shall he return? "Nay," says the apostle, "it is appointed unto men once to die." If you transact not this weighty business right at first, you can never rectify your terrible mistake. There is no salvo of "errors excepted;" no second edition with corrections. No light from heaven penetrates the clod; no voice of pardon echoes through the gloom of the sepulchre. There is no knowledge, nor work, nor device in the grave, whither we are hastening. What need, then, to die aright at first! In most of the great transactions of life, if a blunder be committed, it may be corrected. This is an experiment never to be repeated, and its issues are eternal.

For, lastly, we are to consider death as the termination of our probationary course. In this consists its awful, its infinite importance. It ends the day allotted for repentance, and introduces that interest-

ing period when we must give an account of our stewardship. Then our whole past shall be investigated. How solemn the process! How searching the scrutiny! Every deed done in the body examined by Him who was privy to each; every failure detected; every work of darkness brought to noonday light; no partiality in the Judge; the decision irreversible; the execution instant! Surely it is a solemn thing to die.

Let me conclude this head with an advice as to the way in which we should consider our latter end. It is a general maxim that nothing renders a study so profitable as pursuing it with method and regularity. Let one evening in the week, then, be given up to the duty we are recommending. Whatever period be fixed on, make it sacred as the holy of holies in the Jewish temple. Shut out the visitor and friend, the wife, the domestic, and the child, and let the whole soul be called on to serious contemplation. Such a course, adopted and persevered in, would produce the most happy effects.

Also, make it your care to improve the providences of God around you. You have been, for example, at a sick-bed and have heard the last groans of dissolving nature. Cherish the impressions you have received, and instead of laboring, as is too often done, to blot the gloomy scene from the page of memory, endeavor sometimes to call it up anew and in all its details of thrilling sublimity. The like with funeral solemnities. On entering the house of death endeavor to catch a glimpse of the corpse. It is indeed a melancholy spectacle, but an instructive

teacher. When arrived at the place of interment, screw up your courage to another duty, to look down into the doleful prison-house and say, there, too, is my home. In fine, instead of discouraging, court reflection by improving the various calls and monitions of Providence. This it is to be truly wise, to consider our latter end.

II. Let us proceed to show very briefly that it is so (wise), by pointing out some of the benefits that flow from it. It will be a most powerful antidote against the love of sin. Why is it that so many of those around us have succeeded in the desperate endeavor of casting away utterly all fear of God, and are carried hither and thither by their lusts to work iniquity with greediness? Undoubtedly, one and a principal reason is, they do not reflect; they never call up that awful and certain period when they shall be torn from their unlawful pleasures, and stand naked before God's great tribunal. Could they only be roused from this torpor, the illusions in which they have enveloped themselves would vanish as the mists of the night before the light of the morning. They would ask themselves questions that would give them no rest by day, and appall them with visions by night. How can I live a life of rebellion against that holy and omnipotent Being, who is soon to be my judge? May the summons come to-morrow, to-day, this moment? O my deluded soul! awake from thy sleep; the avenger of blood is behind thee; flee, flee to the horns of the altar. Such is the result to which obedience to our text would lead. It is the most effectual bridle on sinful affections, — the most

eloquent of preachers against all ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Further, it will be found an excellent antidote against that intemperate levity which, with most of us, but especially the young, is a serious impediment to their soul's salvation. Go, my merry gentleman, my roaring, ranting Billy, into thine inner chamber, after having, by thy obscene wit, thy jibes, thy profane gambols, thy wanton songs, set the company in a roar. Go, and converse awhile with death. Let memory recall the convulsions, the wild, distorted eyes, the dying rattle, of some endeared friend. Enter the church-yard; read the inscriptions of here a babe that scarce saw the light; here a man who fell before the destroyer in ruddy health and masculine vigor; here of one who had maintained the contest, as his admiring stone takes care to inform us, until he had nearly completed his century. Mark the hearse approaching to add another. Then turn inward to thyself. Imagine what a short time will undoubtedly realize, — *thy* chamber darkened, *thy* friends standing round *thy* bed, — a stillness only broken by that saddest of litanies, the gasps of a mortal in the last struggle, with the response in sighs and stifled groans of attendants. The physician has ceased his care. Your soul sits on your lips and flutters to be gone. *'Tis* gone. The curtain drops. The tragedy is over! "Alas, poor Yorick! quite chopfallen, now!" Think of such a scene, child of frolic and of fun. It is a bitter remedy, but healing.

Again, it will induce submission to the adverse dispensations, or those we are apt to deem such, of divine

Providence. The man who has reflected much on the end of his journey, must, from the necessity of the case, suffer with equanimity the various ills that may befall him. He knows they will soon be over. Why, then, should he allow himself to be disquieted? If the accommodations of his inn are bad, the night is not long, and there are already indications of morning. Were there no relief in prospect, his case might be thought a hard one compared with that of his fortunate neighbor; but as the whole load is to be thrown off in a few days, while in perhaps a shorter time, his fortunate neighbor will be deprived of all his advantages, it were childish to repine. So the Christian reasons and acts. He sustains disappointments manfully; parts with friends sorrowfully, indeed, but without murmuring; and, in all trials of faith and patience, maintains a serene dignity, of which nothing can deprive him.

Lastly, the due consideration of our latter end will make it easy, when the period arrives. The most effectual method of destroying our fear of an object is making ourselves familiar with it; and thus, frequently contemplating the ugly visage of death, is the best security against that panic terror which its near approach is apt to excite. In this case it does not come by surprise. It finds us prepared, firm, expectant. By anticipating it while yet distant, we were led to make our peace with God through the blood of the everlasting covenant; and thus armed against all emergencies, we shall find its malignity destroyed, the apprehension of it removed, and can exclaim: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the

shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Not only so, but it returns to its original character as the passage-way from earth to heaven, the portal of immortality, the gate of pearl through which the rejoicing saint enters the city of God.

In conclusion, let Christians be animated by the solemn call in our text to increased diligence in their spiritual work. You well know by what an uncertain tenure you hold your present existence. The arrow intended to pierce your heart may be already on the string. In another hour your sun may set in darkness; in another day you may be laid in that unconscious bed where you will have no share in anything under the sun. Endeavor, therefore, to be useful now; and whatever your hands find to do, do it with your might. Perhaps you are looking forward to a protracted period of service in the vineyard. But you may be mistaken. The present only is yours. Whatever opportunities then occur of glorifying God and blessing your fellow-men, promptly and sedulously improve. They have rapid wings; seize them as they fly.

As to you who feel upon your consciences the burden of having entirely at least so far rejected the service of your God and Saviour, let me entreat you to pause and reflect. The arm of divine justice is lifted up, and if it fall it will break your every bone, and sink you into the nethermost hell. Begin, I pray, your work of preparation now. Why not let this day witness your purpose of rising from the lap of indolence and devoting yourselves to the great end

of being? Why not make this day a memorial of your recovery from the fatal lethargy in which you have spent the morning of life — from the palsy of all those nobler powers which the Creator claims as due exclusively to himself? Mark it in your calendar as the day on which you awoke to duty and to God — on which you were born to an immortal life. There is no room for procrastination. The urn which holds the destinies of men is continually shaking, and the first that comes forth perhaps is yours. "Now is the accepted time; now the day of salvation."

The Resurrection of the Body.

XVII.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.

1 *Cor.* 15:42. So also is the resurrection of the dead.

THE doctrine of the resurrection from the dead is the peculiar glory of revelation; and the confident hope of it, one of the Christian's grand supports under his present manifold trials and infirmities. Deprived of all resources but the glimmerings of unenlightened reason, the grave bounds our prospects, and must be contemplated as our permanent abode. In consigning to the sepulchre the remains of beloved friends, no hope of reanimation could be indulged. The fond husband, the tender wife and mother, would perform the last offices to the object dearer to them than life, under the harrowing conviction that it would mingle eternally with its kindred dust. Accordingly, we find that every sect of the ancient heathen philosophers, whatever ideas they might entertain concerning the immortality of the soul, denied, nay, scouted the resuscitation of the body. Hence, when Paul preached "Jesus and the resurrection" to the learned Athenians, both Stoics and Epicureans united in branding him as a babbler and setter-forth of strange doctrines.

Blessed be God, we know this babbling to be the words of truth and soberness. That same gospel which has brought life and immortality to light has given us the assurance that a day is at hand when "they that sleep in the dust shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth: some to life, some to shame and everlasting contempt."

This is the doctrine taught by the apostle in our text; with special reference, however, to those who die the death of the righteous: in *other* parts of his writings the fates of the wicked being given with terrible distinctness. It is our purpose to waive the consideration of the latter at present, — not being invited to it, by the passage; and with regard to the former, we do not propose to offer any elaborate proof of a truth so clearly contained in the Scriptures, but to elucidate and remove prejudices against it by a few plain reflections; making no appeals to the fancy, and little to the feelings, though the subject readily admits of both.

But, first, let us look, for a few moments, at the description given by the apostle of the *qualities* of the risen body. It is full of significance. He warns us against the puerile conception, that there will be a mere reproduction of the present mass of flesh, bones, and sinews, — a conception, which unspeakably degrades the doctrine, and would enlist all cultivated understandings in violent opposition to it. He tells us, plainly, that it shall have undergone *surprising changes*, and differ as much from its former self as the glory of the celestial differs from that of the terrestrial; using expressions, which, if failing in scientific exactness, are eminently suggestive.

"It is sown in corruption." The present body is an aggregate of substances tending to dissolution, — only kept together in consequence of a violence continually exerted on them by that incomprehensible energy called the living principle. Life is thus a *forced state*, in which matter yields a short and reluctant obedience to a foreign master. The seeds of putrefaction are sown broadcast through the whole frame, and are developed by the slightest causes. A trifling part, for example, receives some little injury. It spreads from limb to limb: soon gangrene commences, — steals up to the citadel of life. The immortal spirit, sickened with its habitation, departs in search of other associations: the earth receives it, and it says to corruption, "Thou art my father;" to the worm, "Thou art my mother and my sister."

"It is raised," says the apostle, "in incorruption." It is no more liable to change. The affinities which bind together the various parts are so powerful that no violence can separate them; nor can they be affected by other affinities. Hence, all the seeds of disease and death are left behind in the grave.

"It is sown in dishonor." The curse of Heaven entailed on sin stamps it, while here, with indelible disgrace. In such ignominy is it sown, that its best friends turn away with disgust, and are glad to remove it from their view. Enter a hospital; how shocking the spectacle that offers! — and the same impression, though in a less degree, is made by every dying-bed. No matter how warmly our affections may go forth to the sufferer, underlying our tender sympathies is a feeling that we are contemplating

something *degraded and vile.* When death has taken actual possession, what a chill creeps over the survivors! How fearfully they steal a passing look at the ghastly object! With what an effort they press the last kiss on the clammy forehead; and, after the sod has covered it, what relief they feel, as from an oppressive load! By this wise provision a merciful Providence reconciles us to the anguish of parting, which otherwise would be intolerable. The good Parent proceeds with us, as the mother oftentimes in weaning her reluctant child. By suitable pungent applications she *embitters* the sources of its enjoyment, so that it turns away disgusted from the loving bosom to which it clung a few hours before with such intensity of affection.

But it is "raised *in glory.*" Not only shall every blemish be removed, but it shall be adorned with celestial splendor and beauty. If you want a faint representation of it, look at the sun in his midday brightness; for our Lord informs us, "The righteous shall shine forever, as the sun in the kingdom of the Father." Look at the face of Moses, so radiant with the divine glory reflected from it that a veil must be interposed to render the sight endurable to the human eye. Nay, you must pierce the heavens, and behold Jesus at the right hand of God; for the bodies of his saints, we are told, "shall be fashioned like his own glorious body."

"It is sown *in weakness.*" We all know the feebleness of the human body on its first entrance into life; and this attends it through the whole of its transient existence. But it is raised in strength. When the

great trumpet sounds, the sleeper comes forth free from every trace of infirmity. To use the expressive language of Scripture, the wings of a great eagle are given it, on which it soars aloft, and sees sun, moon, and stars at its feet; yea, with open face and unblanched eye, can behold the glory of the Lord.

"It is sown a natural body." It is at present of the earth, earthy; subject to the same laws which govern inferior animals, actuated by similar impulses; exhausted by labor, tormented by hunger, thirst, and other appetites; destroyed by want of sleep. "But it is raised a spiritual body." Though still material, it will be so refined that its qualities will bear a sort of resemblance to those angelic spirits. A complete emancipation will take place from bondage to animal cravings. The sensations of hunger and thirst, owing to some wonderful change in its constitution that will provide the supplies to its vitality from without in another way, shall never return. So spiritual will be its substance, that, instead of clogging the soul, it will be her aid and vehicle, in carrying on those noble employments that constitute the felicity of the future state: it will attend her most rapid movements, and with her expatiate untired through all the vast works of God.

Nor can we doubt that the senses, those corporeal avenues through which she obtains the greater part of her knowledge, will be prodigiously multiplied and enlarged, enabling her to take in ideas of objects and their qualities, of which she has no more conception at present than the man born deaf of sounds, or the blind of the hues of the rainbow.

Such is the brief description given by the apostle of the change that awaits us. Our belief in it is not a conjecture, nor the offspring of our wishes, which are so often fathers to our thoughts and give a false truthfulness to the merest figments of imagination. A divine Teacher hath divulged the secrets of the grave. That same Jesus who, in his own person, broke the bands of death, proving, by the best of all methods, the *experimental* and historical, that there is an upward way from the darkness of the tomb, has given the assurance that all who love him shall share in his triumph: "*Our* mortal shall put on immortality; our corruption shall put on incorruption."

We observe, in the first place, that such an event is *possible;* involves no absurdity or contradiction. This might seem to be making small progress in the discussion. Yet it is really more than half, covering the whole ground of plausible opposition. The principal argument against our doctrine — a doctrine so congenial to all the aspirations of the heart — originates in the notion of some *absolute impossibility*, which, being absolute, cannot be overcome even by almighty power. On this principle it was opposed by the philosophers of old, with whom Paul came in contact on a memorable occasion. They regarded it as contradictory and absurd. Looking no higher than the most ordinary and vulgar class of second causes, and worshipping gods nearly as imbecile as themselves, — when they contemplated the human frame as dissolved in the dust, mingled with the ashes of hundreds of generations, incorporated with brutes, with vegetables, with other men, blended with

the elements, — they pronounced the belief of it the monstrous birth of a disordered brain.

Such, too, is the reasoning of *modern* opposers. Determined, in their pride of wisdom, to fathom every truth with the plumb-line, not only of their own reason, but, what is immeasurably more preposterous, their own experience, they, in all the procedures of their understandings, adopt the maxim, that scarcely anything is possible which they cannot explain. Finding our doctrine to contradict present appearances, to demand a reference to other agencies than those which are seen daily operating around them, they rush to the inference at once, that it *must* not, *cannot* be.

But what fatuity is this! Do we not, every hour, witness facts we cannot account for, the denial of whose possibility would establish universal scepticism? Mark the reasoning of an apostle, on this subject, in answer to the question, "How are the dead raised up, and with what bodies do they come?" "Thou fool!" he demands. But this rendering of the original is too pungent. The objections to a rising of the dead, that force themselves on the most honest mind, in which simple faith in God has not wrought its perfect work, are plausible and exceedingly perplexing. No wonder that they startled such babes in religious attainment as the Corinthians, who had only yesterday passed out from the darkness of heathenism, and, like other children, were disposed to ask questions. Paul, as a Christian gentleman, would not, on this account, brand them with an epithet the most contemptuous

and offensive in our strong Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. We hear him saying, then, not "Thou fool," or thou Jesuit, Deist, Atheist, Pantheist, — with which many of our polemics adorn their paragraphs, and call it strong writing, — but, "O thou man without reflection. Consult thine own experience. That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die, and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, perchance of wheat or some other grain." "Show me," he challenges them, "how this is effected. Expound, in an intelligent way, this common, every-day resurrection: then will *I* turn expounder, and solve all questions concerning the resurrection of the body. What more different than the seed-corn lying in the earth without root, blade, stock, and ear, — and its subsequent state? Who could have anticipated the change? Who, on your maxims, could have thought it *possible*, were it not matter of daily observation? Cannot, then, the power of God, that vivified the grain, lying to appearance dead and putrid in the earth, also restore our bodies after dissolution, calling them up from the noisome pit to a new and permanent life?"

Paul's logic is as strong as it is ingenious.

But something more special must be said on this point. Difficulties have been urged, with no little pertinacity, which have thrown a cloud over many minds fully alive to the greatness and power of God. "Changes are continually going on in the human frame, so great that it loses its proper identity a hundred times before its departure from the present life. How, then, is it possible that the *same mass* of

matter (a hundred times renewed) should be raised? Besides, many of the particles have been absorbed in other men's bodies, — those of cannibals, for instance, whose substance, we may suppose, in many cases, to be made up of the flesh and blood of their victims: thus two or even a hundred individuals may be claimants of the same body." These, with other objections from the same mint, seem, in the view of some, to place a literal resurrection beyond the reach of Divine Almightiness.

In replying, allow me to observe, that the supposition of the same material properties that form the body is not essential to our Christian faith. It is pleasing to the fancy, and, constituted as we are, it is scarcely possible, perhaps, to maintain a lively, glowing belief in the substantial truth, without investing it with this agreeable aspect. The pure intellect often passes over its naked forms to the imagination, that they may receive the clothing and color necessary to give them power over the heart. When they meet with opposition, however, they must be taken back — reduced to their original simplicity — from the imaginative faculty, and subjected to the severe and searching logic of the understanding. We repeat, then, that the supposition of an identity of particles in the resurrection body with that of the old is not at all essential to the Christian faith. Nothing — certainly nothing serious — forbids that the identity of the present and future vehicle of the soul will be of the same kind with that which *now subsists*, — an identity of *function*, of *use*, and of *relation* to one and the same thinking substance. It is undoubtedly

true, that, in strict exactness of expression, we are not the same that we were a few months since; that every atom has departed and been succeeded by others. Yet it is equally true, that we never perplex ourselves with the fear of being passed into different men. Our arms, legs, and eyes, our nerves, sinews, and flesh have more than once been changed for other legs and arms, nerves, sinews, and flesh; yet we affirm, without stopping a moment to consider the matter, that we possess the same body that years ago slept in our mother's arms! The principle on which this is done runs through the whole animal and vegetable kingdom, and is even applied to collections of dead matter. We call a river the same to-day as yesterday, though not *a drop of water is the same.* We call the gallant frigate, that fifty years ago spread its country's ensign to the breeze, the *same*, though not a plank or nail remains of the original structure. The common sense of mankind laughs at the small logic that would prove an error in such phraseology. They are the same, because they perform the same *functions* and sustain the same *relations* to every object around them. No difference *exists in our ideas of them;* and language, that great instrument of human convenience, formed entirely for practical uses, recognizes their identity, with a profound contempt for ontological distinctions, which would only unfit it to be the medium of social intercourse. Now the gospel speaks to us in plain, human language,—addresses itself to the popular understanding. Although, therefore, not a particle of the risen body may be able to establish a claim of prior occupancy;

though the various earths and gases which compose it, — the soda, potash, and hydrogen and carbon, — are there *for the first time;* the blessed doctrine of the text is not in the least affected. The Apostle Paul asks, in an argument, "Does God care for oxen?" And we may ask here, does he care for phosphate of lime? In compounding the resurrection bodies of his people, will it be of the smallest consequence to him or to us that the identical pinch of iron and half-farthing's worth of sulphur which entered into the old, at some period of their ever-varying existence, are not present to occupy their former position? Perhaps not only shall the numerical particles all be changed, but the *substances* themselves; and the rich stores of nature shall be ransacked for more exquisite ingredients. If so, who will find it out; and if detected by some knowing Faraday or Humphrey Davy, *who will care?*

There is still another view of the subject, in which some of the best and strongest Christian minds have acquiesced the more readily, because it has a basis in Holy Scripture. They suppose the existence in human bodies of certain *stamina*, or *germs*, formed by the cohesion of particles united by such powerful affinities that no power in nature can destroy them. These may possess a *torpid, potential* vitality, which resists the decomposing agencies continually operating on animal matter, may lie in the grave as seeds which have been known to retain their reproductive virtue for centuries, and, at the appointed time, the grand *vernal epoch* of humanity, touched by the genial influences of the new heavens and the new

earth, may warm into activity, gather, by mysterious laws of their own nature, from earth and air, the elements required to their organization, into a complete human body; and this body may, by a similar attraction, find out its immortal companion, to form a union with it, which shall never be dissolved. Who dare deny the *possibility* of such nuclei or seeds of future life? The Apostle Paul most evidently favors the supposition (if he goes no farther), in the remarkable passage on which I am commenting. He asserts the identity of the risen body to be the same with that of the plant, its parent seed. This view commends itself, not only as being supported by analogies in nature, but on another account, to which I simply advert. We have already stated, that, according to the common language and sentiments of mankind, the identity of a body is not affected by any change of the particles which compose it, so long as its relations to all other things continue the same, and it performs the same functions and offices as heretofore to one and the same conscious mind. But this gives us an *additional* principle of unity, which goes far to satisfy the cravings of the imagination and the heart for something more palpable. It furnishes a basis of *objective* truth and reality, namely, a participation in one continued life, extending forwards as well as backwards, and remaining unbroken amid the constant change of fleeting particles. The oak is the same as that slender twig which, to our great grand-parents, appeared just peeping from the earth a hundred years before, because there is one spirit of life of which they are both participants; and

so long as this continues, the identity is complete. And so of animals. The full-grown elephant is the same, not only with itself newly born, but with the first speck of life in the womb, and that cannot be discerned by the most powerful vision. Now this *continuity* is fully maintained by the doctrine under notice. The body never entirely yields to the law of dissolution. It does not *all* die. That mystery of mysteries, the principle of vitality, lives on, reposing in the bosom of the earth, and waiting for the hour of development, which will surely come at the proper time and manner. You see, therefore, that our graveyards still retain their poetry. The truth of things does not, as is too often the case, blast with a sirocco breath the natural sentiment. It is not an illusion which sends you to weep and to rejoice over your departed ones. They are really *there*. From that very spot shall the young bird of Paradise, waking out of its long winter sleep, fly to its native skies.

But it is hard, you say, to conceive of these mere rudiments of life, *so small*, so capable of *resisting time and change*, for a period of indefinite duration. With regard to their *smallness:* they are not whales or krakens, but their size is quite equal to your own. At the earliest period of your existence, had a naturalist been curious to pay you a visit of inspection, he would have been compelled to take with him a solar microscope. The primitive cell out of which, the physiologist informs us, all living organisms are formed, may, in every case, even that of the largest animals, when separated from the matter in which

nature has enveloped it for safe-keeping, be too minute for appreciation by the keenest sense. We speak of seeds and the eggs of birds as possessing a degree of bulk which may be seen and handled. But by far the greatest quantity of substance that forms these, is in reality nothing more than the *envelopment* or *husk:* the true life-germ within being absolutely invisible till the period of germination, when the husk, obeying the beautiful laws which govern the whole process, falls away; or, as the apostle expressed it, *dies;* and the young plant, no longer cribbed and cabined by environments which have now completed their service and become worse than useless, bounds into a higher life. As to their power of resisting decomposition: look at a drop of water. It is formed by the combination of two gaseous substances, possessing no quality in common, except the general attributes of matter. Yet the boiling of a thousand years would not drive them asunder. They are decomposed, indeed, by the agency of galvanism. But galvanism is not omnipotent. Sure, there may be innumerable unions, over which even *this* giant has no power whatever; and who will affect such knowledge of the inscrutable mystery of organized life, as to say, with any assurance, that it cannot coexist with various compounds, the constituents of which no power of nature, none, at least, with which we are acquainted, can sunder. It is a well-established fact, that the seeds of ordinary plants have been found in situations (the coffins of mummies, for instance) where they remained, in such perfect preservation for more than two thousand years, that

when taken out and sown, they have not only germinated, but advanced to a healthy maturity.

These different explanations have been adduced without the least desire on our part to adopt one or the other as an article of faith. The experience of all time proves the vanity of attempting to demonstrate beforehand in what way God will fulfil his plans and purposes. Somehow he almost always disappoints us. "*Wait upon him — wait*," is the dictate both of true science and true religion. Yet the considerations advanced are not without use; because they show the unreasonableness of that presumptuous dogmatism which, by a loud and continued ringing of changes on the word "*impossible*," would rob us of one of the most precious truths which Christianity has brought down from heaven to bless mankind. Nothing in the world more easy than to argue in that manner, if it merit the name of argument. It requires only a good deal of self-conceit, a very small insight into the boundless magnificence and variety in whose bosom the little atoms called men and women are floating, and the smallest possible fraction of reverence for the Almighty Creator. It seems more than probable, if it admits any doubt at all, that there is not a single law of physics, gravitation, impulse, electricity, magnetism, which a large portion of mankind would not pronounce "impossible," were they not operating every day before their eyes. If one of them, — the effect of lightning, for example, or the decomposition of water, — was simply predicted as a phenomenon of a future world, exhibited as an *object of faith, not of present actual observation*,

there would, I question not, be a general outburst of amazement and incredulity!

And this suggests some reflections, which are often overlooked, to the serious detriment not only of the truth under discussion, but of many others, standing in close relation to the future destiny of the race. It is strangely assumed, that the final consummation of all things, including the resurrection, judgment, and the whole chain of events that follow, is not the development of a system governed by general laws, which are in perfect harmony with other general laws, but *deviations*, *miraculous interferences* of the Creator, to meet certain exigencies which have been produced by the entrance of moral evil. Thus sin created a necessity of dying, which previously had not been contemplated, and the introduction of death rendered a new set of measures necessary,— for example, the resurrection,— to bring it into line with the divine plans. The whole economy of things has in this way been rescinded, and succeeded by a scheme of special agency. Creation has proved a *blunder* on the part of the great Architect, which has demanded *another* creation to put matters right, and meet, by proper adjustment, the extraordinary emergency which, though foreseen, was not provided for.

We regard this as a crude and unsupported hypothesis. There is not the smallest ground for imagining that the introduction of moral evil has disturbed the general laws of nature and humanity; that our chemistry, astronomy, physics, have suffered any material change from the events that transpired in the garden of Eden six thousand years ago. And

we affirm, by parity of reason, that none has occurred in the laws of organic life. Death (we speak not of it in the awful scriptural sense of a moral event, associated with all that is fearful in a sense of guilt and a foreboding of future punishment), but as simply a dissolution of the body into its original elements, consisting of a few gases and metallic particles, was a *necessity of human nature from the start.* That body was entirely unfit to be the permanent residence of the spirit, and was destined to give up, by the same processes to which the living organism is now subject, its constituent parts to the great bosom from which they were taken.

But the thought cannot stop here. It is pregnant with another momentous conclusion. The reunion with another material fabric, adapted to an immortal life, must also have been *provided for;* this, too, by original activities implanted at the first creation. What they precisely are, when they begin to operate, and how they will develop themselves in the far future, is one of the secrets of Him who "worketh all things according to the counsel of his will." Even the ordinary agencies, constantly at work around us, are, as already stated, known only by their *effects.* Not one could be predicted beforehand. Historians of science note, with curious interest, certain presentiments of natural laws which floated, like the half-waking dreams in the minds of men of genius, long before their actual discovery. But the really curious part of the matter is, that when man dreams so much, so very few instances are recorded that the human mind should at all times have so blun-

dered and floundered, like a drunken man, in the dark, whenever it undertook to pronounce on the truth of things, — *à priori*, as it is called, — and without the previous teachings of experience. Man is a wretched prophet, almost sure to err where the future is anything more than a mere reflection of the past. Who, to use again the apostolic illustration already referred to, could have announced, at the first planting of a seed-corn in the earth, that, after lying torpid for months and even years, it would rise up with a richer life than it possessed before? Doubtless the first manifestation of such a change filled the simple observer not only with wonder, but awe and terror, as if the epoch of miracles was recommencing, and another creating day had dawned. Yet observation teaches us, that it is the effect of a prolific virtue, originally implanted, when God said, "Let the earth bring forth herb yielding seed and fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind whose seed is in the earth." We now expect and demand it. The inscrutability of the process, our inability to trace the secret workings of those vital energies by which the change is effected, cease to startle us, *merely* because we are accustomed to the fact. It is precisely so with our subject. A time will come when a comprehensive survey of the great whole, and the potencies which govern it, will show that the reunion of soul and body is not a miracle, nor divine afterthought, nor patch upon a rent, but belongs to the legitimate order of nature; not, indeed, the poor contracted nature of which we have present cognizance, — a pailful out of the Atlantic, — but that

which corresponds with the greatness and majesty of the Being who "spoke and it was done; who commanded and it stood fast." Meanwhile let us acknowledge that there are "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Nothing is more modest than genuine science. It never forgets that it stands in the midst of a triangle, encompassed by three grand immensities, — the immensity of God, the immensity of the universe, and the immensity of human ignorance.

To some there may be a difficulty in adopting the view of the subject just taken, founded on the *instantaneousness* ascribed in the Holy Scriptures to the resurrection. It shall take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet;" which phrases seem to exclude the gradual operation of general laws, and demand a special act of power identical with that which originally called into existence the universe. But the objection has no force. Every day the student of nature perceives stupendous effects from processes so slow and gradual that they are scarcely, if at all, observed; and the result seems to come out not by evolution, but *sudden, instantaneous projection.* Take the well-known "century plant," as an example, which, after vegetating during a hundred years a rough, unsightly shrub, exhibiting no marked appearance of change or progress, bursts forth into all its floral magnificence in a single night. So it may be with the precious seed whose development is the theme of our inspired apostle. That "moment," that "twinkling of an eye," that "last trump," may only express the glori-

ous consummation of a series of operations produced by influences secretly at work during a long series of ages, and which commenced their action when the first man was laid in the first grave. We would not dogmatically affirm on such a subject. All we aim at is, to invoke reason, analogy, and the common observation of mankind, against those who would dogmatically deny. In opposition to them we hold, as infinitely probable, that the seminal principles of our corporeal immortality, like those of our spiritual, are *already sown;* that their germination and complete unfolding into future life is, *at this very moment*, a law of physics, though one not yet scientifically explored, and, therefore, not having place in our mean and meagre philosophies.

Let me now advert to a few of the probabilities in favor of a reunion to the body : for, though the light of nature cannot either discover or prove it, independently of a divine attestation, yet, from various sources, an amount of presumptive evidence may be gathered that is not without force ; while the trains of reflection opened up are highly pleasing. Look at the admirable structure of the body. One of the most satisfactory arguments from reason for the continued existence of the soul is its lofty endowments, which render the thought intolerable that it must close its career with this brief life. The ancient pagans well understood and admirably improved this topic in their moral speculations ; and one is apt to wonder that they were not conducted by it to something like a belief in the doctrine under present consideration.

When we think how fearfully and wonderfully we are made, — how exquisitely the material part is organized, not only for animal enjoyment, but for companionship with the immaterial principle in all its spiritual actings, — it is extremely difficult, on the assumption that death is a *finality*, to avoid exclaiming with the psalmist, in one of his melancholy moods, "Surely, thou hast made all men in vain." Why such expense in erecting the most beautiful of edifices, when, in a few months or years at furthest, it must be torn down and lie in the dust forever? Especially will this thought be impressive when we compare its duration with that of numerous animals, and even vegetables. How many are the beasts of the field who trample on the tombs of parents and their children! How many generations has the lofty oak seen prostrated, before its giant strength betrayed the least symptom of decay! And is it truly the divine constitution that the ignoble and valueless abide, while worth and beauty pass away? Scarcely. May we not rather view the taking down of our earthly tabernacle as a prelude to its being raised again, more fair, stately, and permanent?

There are presumptions of another kind drawn from analogy. Glancing over the wide domain of life that surrounds us on all sides, like the atmosphere we breathe, we discover changes of various kinds equivalent to resurrections. The cedar that reigns over the forest is but the resurrection of a cedar that reigned before. The regular transformations and progressions from state to state of many animals encourage a pleasing hope that when the sepulchre closes upon

us its iron gates, our career in the body is not terminated. A few days since that gilded butterfly, which spreads its colors to the sun, was a crawling worm, which, after a definite period, entered a coffin curiously manufactured by itself, and there lay in state, exhibiting every appearance of death. All of us are acquainted with the phenomenon of animal torpidity. No sooner do the blasts of winter begin to announce their approach by cloudy days, chilling nights, and low moanings in the distance, than whole tribes of animals retreat to their coverts, and undergo a species of death, till quickened again by the genial influences of spring. We ourselves furnish a lesson to ourselves. What is sleep but a kind of anticipative death? What more akin to the gloom of the sepulchre than midnight, when all animated nature is sunk in helpless inaction?

The strong *desire* for reunion is not without its force in this connection. It deserves our notice, that in all the analogies quoted the animal is *disposed* for his coming change by a powerful instinct or presentiment. He seems to look forward to and desire it; and many of his preparatory arrangements are so happily adapted that they excite our profound admiration. Does not the same spirit of prophecy, anticipation, desire, hope, characterize the human animal? How we linger round the cold remains of a friend, till absolutely driven from it! How we care for it, as for some precious gem not always to be trodden in the dust! How reverently we commit it to the keeping of its mother earth! bidding it good-night, as if in attendance on the

couches of royalty! How sacred is the spot where he lies! How often do we retire there, not alone to weep, but to hold sweet communion with the departed; and say, "We shall meet again." And, when under the teachings of the great Master, we ponder his words: "I am the resurrection and the life; whoso believeth on me shall never die," what rapture pours its full tide through the soul! We seize the blessed annunciation, as Mary clasped the knees of her risen Lord, and will not let it go. All our visions of future happiness cluster round the idea, and receive from it their form and fashion. We shall *see* the glories of the celestial city, *walk* its golden streets, *hear* its music; and the arches of its great temple shall resound forever with our *songs*. Such things may have little weight to the speculative understanding when viewed apart and in detail; but in a mass they are to the heart impressive. They are significant symbols inscribed in the book of nature, though none but the thoughtful read and understand them. They do not demonstrate; but are pleasant echoes from the air, the forest, and the depths of the human spirit, to the voice of the heavenly oracle.

Attend, now, to some recorded *Scripture facts*, which, proving that cases have already occurred, remove all strangeness from the idea of a universal victory over the grave. Scarcely do you open your Bibles, when you come upon a fact of this kind, startling by its unexpectedness, and thrilling by the beautiful simplicity of the relation. As a recompense for his fidelity in the midst of faithless con-

temporaries, Enoch is translated to heaven, both soul and body. "He was not, for God took him." This was not, we confess, precisely a resurrection; but it intimates, with great clearness, that the body shall play its part in a future life. Proceeding further, we are astonished at beholding Elijah ascending, in a chariot of flame, to glory; proclaiming thus to all revolving ages, not only that there was a way opened for men into the highest heavens, but that their very bodies had access to the presence of God. Previously, however, we see him recalling the departed spirit of the son of the Sidonian widow. Elisha, his successor, performs the same office for another, showing that he inherits his Master's spirit and power. Even death does not rob him of it; for no sooner does a dead body touch his corpse, than it revives and proclaims the praises of the Lord God of Elijah.

I grant that the doubt is possible whether these narratives, allowing them the fair measure of inspiration which an enlightened theology concedes to the Old Testament historical annals, will bear the whole superstructure of inference that has been erected on them. But, I insist that, viewed in no other light than as *reflections of the religious ideas entertained in an age of vision and prophecy*, they are fraught with interest. They show that the germs of a complete Christianity not only existed, but were quickening and warming into life, even at that early period. The Christian instinct was clearly at work in the hearts of the pious. It was not waiting for a college of apostles to recite its creed, but recited it as well

as the best apostle of them all: "I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting." Certainly, the idea of an embodied existence in a future state was received by the church in very ancient times; not, perhaps, in a *dogmatic* form, but as a *sentiment*, or holy *intuition*, of which she could give no other account than that it formed a part of her religious consciousness.

But we come now to an example in regard to which there can be no mistake. Jesus appears, — that wonderful being who stands alone in the world's history, — in whom the infinite and finite were so mysteriously blended, that for a moment, at the first perusal of the record, we stand amazed, — in perplexity whether to adore the God, or embrace, with human tenderness, the brother, till we resolve the problem by combining both in one undivided act of trust, worship, and fervent love.

The daughter of Jairus having gone the way of all the earth, He enters the place where she lay, took her hand and said, "Talitha-cumi," and the damsel arose and walked. In the course of his benevolent peregrinations, he approached the city of Nain. A bier meets him containing the only son of a widow. Moved with compassion, our great High Priest, who is not ashamed to have a fellow-feeling with human sorrow, says, "Young man, arise; and he arose." Soon after, Lazarus goes down to the tomb. Four days elapse, during which he continues sleeping and festering in his dark prison-house. Jesus arrives, — drops a tear, but not over the loss of his friend; for he commands: "Lazarus, come forth; and straightway he arose."

Of these miracles, we take the most contracted possible view, if we consider them as designed merely to give high ideas of the Saviour's power, that spectators might be thrown into a stupid maze, which would force them to acknowledge the divinity of his mission. Surely they had a deeper meaning. They symbolized the nature of his kingdom; the grand order of facts and actualities into which it should be developed. In a word, the singular interest always evinced by Christ in the human body was designed to familiarize us with the idea of its future fortunes; its participation in the blessings he procured as the restorer of our fallen nature. Without this supposition, they are sportings of giant strength, destitute of true dignity and elevation; because imparting no valuable lesson, and only gratifying the vulgar appetite for what is strange.

Advance a step further in his history. In the examples just cited, you see the God, breathing over the slain, and, by his divine prerogative, restoring the life he originally communicated. Next, behold the *man* himself, though not for himself, tasting death's bitterness. At the dawn of the third following day, earth proclaims, by her convulsions, the second birth of her glorious Lord, and he comes forth to the confusion of his enemies and the rapture of desponding friends. Henceforth he becomes the plague of death and the destruction of the grave; in testimony of which we are told many came from their sepulchres, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Thus, from what has been, we gather precious intimations of what shall be.

corner of the veil that conceals the world of invisibles has been raised, that we may look in and see on its highest throne, clothed with human flesh, that Mighty One who declared on earth that when he was lifted up he would draw all men unto him.

Our conceptions, however, on this point, will fall exceedingly short of the truth, if we consider the resurrection of Jesus as only carrying with it the force of a great example. He is not only the first fruits of the immortal harvest, but, in a sense, the harvest itself, — the whole human nature he came to redeem being in him virtually and potentially, through the mystic union which binds them together as the head with its body, the root with its branches. His victory over the grave is, therefore, infinitely more than a precedent; it is a *principle* including the triumph of all his followers. *Bold and daring* is the language of the great apostle on this subject: in many parts of his writings going so far as to represent Christians as actually risen and standing in their ascension robes before the throne. "And hath raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." "Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him." "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." See here the power of Christian faith. Standing on the heights of holy contemplation, it sees the blue hills of Canaan as objects close upon the eye, and already reached. With such intensity of confidence in the issue does it see them, that it takes no account of the dark and turbid stream that yet separates from the happy shore. "Our life is hid with Christ

in God; and when he which is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." It must be so. The head can no more exist without the body than the body without the head.

As to the direct proofs of our doctrine, we waive the discussion as needless. None but the utterly blind, or victims of some monstrous delusion, can fail of perceiving them. The truth shines like a sunbeam on every page, and looms up from every paragraph. Nor, indeed, is this surprising; for so closely is it interwoven with the whole texture of Christianity, that the denial of it subverts the very foundations of our faith. "Yea," says the apostle, "we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up if so be the dead rise not: for if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins: then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

In improving the subject, let us observe how much the human race is indebted to the gospel. Of all systems of religion, it is the *only one* that has satisfactorily exhibited the doctrine discussed. Consult the representatives of ancient wisdom, and you find that great as was the multitude of thoughts within them, and infinite the variety of their speculations, the dream of it never entered their minds. By aid, indeed, of a prolific imagination, they excogitated a sort of *substitute*, — fancying departed spirits to be surrounded by a condensed atmosphere, which they called a shade, presenting all the lineaments of the

body while on earth. But this, it is evident, was a doctrine very different from that of a resurrection, as well as a thousand times more visionary. In consequence of ignorance here, the best of them enjoyed small comfort from their views of the immortality of the soul. There is something very endearing in the connection which exists between the body and the spirit. So admirably are they adjusted to each other, — like the strings of a musical instrument, — so wonderfully sympathize with each other's movements, that the idea of disruption produces the same kind of shock we feel at hearing of a rupture between two intimate, long-endeared friends. They are twins, — born together, living together, — always rejoicing in each other's presence. And must all this end? Have we been united by such tender bonds only to experience the pangs of eternal separation? Almost could I wish that the stroke which laid low my friend, had also fallen on me, that I might accompany him to the land of forgetfulness. Something like this, methinks, would be the expostulation of the soul. The vague notion of a *pure, spiritual immortality* — a continued existence of the principle of thought, divorced from connection with matter — is not calculated to satisfy the needs of the heart. A blank is felt in the belief which gives a cold and dreary aspect to the whole, and which nothing can fill up but the doctrine of re-union to the body, — the doctrine of a *whole, unmutilated humanity.*

It is undoubtedly true, that we may conceive of the soul as a pure, spiritual essence, acting independently of any corporeal vehicle. Such, we are con-

strained to imagine, will be the case during the interval between death and the resurrection. But it is equally true that in this provisional state of being her powers will be *extremely limited*, and shut out *entirely from the field of external nature.* Our organs of sense are the sole medium through which we obtain an acquaintance with this department of knowledge. It has no existence to us, but in certain *visible and tangible qualities*, which, it is unreasonable to suppose, God will impart by new and miraculous expedients. The disembodied spirit must, therefore, stand completely *isolated from matter;* capable, indeed, of a transcendental happiness in the contemplation of other ideas, but excluded, necessarily, from the fair garden of this outer world, the hills and dales, the rivers, trees, and plains, the sun and starry skies, among which she now expatiates with, alas, too fond delight. Perhaps, the reason of her temporary unclothing is, that she may smooth her ruffled pinions, and recover from that earthly taint she has contracted by exclusive devotion here to things seen and temporal. However this is, it seems absolutely necessary that she be joined by her old companion to *re-establish her relations* with the fair variety of things around her, and become a successful student of the magnificent mechanism of the universe. Immortality is without it little better than a jejune abstraction, unfit to grapple with the coarse realities of life, and ever ready to slide out of the mind altogether. The phantom, to become really impressive, must be clothed in flesh and blood; the idea, to retain its hold, must be *solidified* by union

with the material subject which may impart a portion of its own fixedness.

But to estimate the value of our doctrine, we must regard it in another connection. It was one of the most powerful elements of that *great moral force* that Christianity brought to bear against the vile sensuality in which mankind was sunk, at the period of our Saviour's advent, apparently beyond the possibility of recovery. Look at the great apostle, addressing, on this subject, the most voluptuous and corrupted city on the face of the earth! "Flee fornication," is the text of his discourse. Your bodies are *sacred to the Lord;* they are members of that blessed Redeemer who died for you; they are the temples of the Holy Ghost; they shall be raised up at the last day. Will you *dare* prostitute them to offices which would degrade a brute, and cut yourselves off from the blessedness of the children of God? I ask you, was not pleading of this kind more potent a thousand times to gain its end, than all the elegant speculations that dropped from the honeyed lips of Plato? There was nothing in it wire-drawn or obscure. It supplied to the poor Gentile a distinct, tangible reason *why* he should abstain from pollution; for it told him that his body was an honorable part of him, which he was bound to reverence, because *God* honored it. In the days of his ignorance nothing better could be expected than that he should treat it as a mere instrument of lust. It was good for nothing else. In a short time it must die, rot, and perish forever: why, then, we may suppose

him saying, should I treat the miserable thing with any ceremony? Why not kick and cuff it like a dog, if I can obtain any gratification in this way? — the miserable cur will never appear hereafter to complain of its treatment: "Let me eat and drink, for to-morrow I die."

But how differently does he now view the subject in the light of Christian truth! What a change is wrought in his estimate of that carcass he thought so vile! All its meanness is gone; a halo of glory rests on its head; its cheek is flushed with an immortal hope; its sparkling eyes look upward to the heavens; a divine vigor pervades every limb. It has become a worthy companion of the never-dying spirit and of angels who see the face of God. Ask him now whether he will not cherish and respect it; whether watching over its purity, that he may present it, at last, as a chaste virgin unto Christ, be not worth his most strenuous exertions. In this way, our holy religion, by plans and methods of its own, heals the diseases of the mind; proving that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.

Again, we here see the moral idea of a Christian funeral. You are aware that, before the coming of Christ, the general practice of the heathen was to *burn* their dead; and that the change to burying took place as soon as a man with his family became Christian. The converts to the gospel considered the body in the light of seed sown in the ground, which should certainly spring up at the appointed

time. Hence, they recoiled with horror from the custom of consuming with fire (so expressive of contempt and suggestive of annihilation), and consigned it to the earth, as precious grain: thus signifying their esteem for it, and their confident belief that it should rise again. Accordingly they called the repositories of their dead, *cemeteries* or *sleeping-places*. We have adopted and use the word, without always calling up its beautiful import.

Let these reflections attend you while you pay the last solemn offices to departed Christian friends. Parent, from whom has been torn the tender bud that was just commencing to put forth its blossoms; child, who hast lost the pious guide of thy youth; widow, bereaved of that loving companion with whom thou didst so often take sweet counsel, and walk to the house of God in company; — why weepest thou? That beloved one is not dead, but *sleepeth*. He is safe; infinitely safer than if reposing in your arms. He has gone down to the tomb to undergo a purifying process; and the result will be, in due time, his corruption putting on incorruption; his mortal immortality!

Finally, let us reflect that though our doctrine be good tidings, it is only such to the penitent and believing. To you who make no claim to this character, it is not a message of love and joy, but of blank despair. True, you shall be raised; you shall hear, with others, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; but on that awful day when you stand before the judgment-seat, see the books opened

and hear a sentence that will extinguish every spark of hope, you will realize the solemn truth I now proclaim in the ears of all: "As there is a resurrection unto life, so there is a resurrection unto damnation."

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